

## I HEARD THE OLD MEN SAY

Secrets of the Cape that has vanished, and little-known dramas on the fringe of living memory.

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## Chapter One

### TURN THE KEY OF TIME

*To wind the mighty secrets  
of the past,  
And turn the key of time.*

HENRY KIRKE WHITE

CAPE TOWN has a “Petticoat Lane,” strident as a brass band, fragrant with aromatic herbs, crowded with weird merchandise, alive with idlers of many races. I am a born idler, and on fine Saturday mornings I can hardly keep away from this place. Half a century ago I began to feel the

magic of the Grand Parade, and I am still finding unsuspected treasure on the loaded tables.

Here is free entertainment, though I miss the old performers. Turbaned conjurers from India, father and son, used to breathe fire. White-helmeted, white-coated Cartwright sold razor blades with all the patter of a born comedian, for he knew his customers well and gave the fictitious impression that he was offering stolen goods at low prices. Another man wore a huge sombrero and pulled snakes from his pockets. And there was the daring quack who swallowed his own pills – or appeared to do so.

The Parade is still a teeming market place, still Cape Town's largest open space. Some come here for horse-brasses, or candelabra from Victorian drawing-rooms, or old Cape silver if they can discover it. I buy mushrooms and sweet-smelling *wateruintjies* in season, artichokes and brinjals. But above all I am ever hopeful that some kindly ghost of old Cape Town will guide me to the books and papers of my dreams. One almost supernatural experience has led me to expect further revelations in the future, and if I go on long enough that desire may be satisfied. I want to know the secrets of Old Cape Town.

Faded newspapers, tattered annuals and street directories, old magazines, notebooks and diaries

have revealed, a great deal of a past which has me in its grip. Especially the forgotten newspapers. Nothing in the whole world of print is more likely to be lost than a paragraph of small type on the back page of a newspaper printed years ago.

I also met an optimist who searched every second-hand cookery book on the Parade stalls for secret recipes. Apparently one of the most successful Van der Hum formulas came into the possession of a wine merchant in this way. The searcher informed me that the original Chartreuse recipe fetched thousands of pounds when the monks parted with it, and he hoped to find a South African liqueur or a forgotten sauce or marvellous *blatjang* that would be worth a

fortune. I must say that the hand-written recipes in my old Cape cookery books are sometimes more valuable than the printed word.

That benevolent ghost I spoke about must have willed me to halt not so long ago at the stall where I picked up a guide to Cape Town published in 1904. I forgot my surroundings as I studied the fat and tattered book. Then I paid three shillings, and carried it away to my car for closer study. I had a prize and I knew it. The bookseller could have demanded three pounds, not three shillings, and got it.

It was no rare item of Africana that I had bought, but I had seen in a flash that it was a book with additions which would have a

special value for me. Marginal notes and queries caught my eye. Inspiration stared me in the face.

Under a flap at the back the previous owner had stowed away an exciting collection of scraps, possibly for further investigation when he found the time. First of all there was an old Robben Island chart with a few names added. "Malay tomb" appeared near the landing stage, and the words: "Whose tomb?" There was also a name and date – Hickson, July 1922. That name stirred my own memories.

Next I found an envelope grimly decorated with a drawing of a gallows, and filled with newspaper cuttings describing executions. This

packet came to me without comment of any kind, but I shall not leave it at that. You will look into the envelope in due course.

Another envelope contained obituary notices of characters once well-known in Cape Town. Some I had encountered as a reporter, and I was able to fill in the gaps in the paragraphs. Others had lived before my time, though (for one reason or another) they were the kind of people I would have liked to have met. This unknown collector seemed to have been especially interested in centenarians. And why not indeed? I, too, have gazed with deep respect on those who have lived, almost miraculously in my view, to that great age; and I have always asked them to reveal the

ways of life which enabled them to live so long.

Old menus, reflecting a Cape Town in which hotel keepers served generous breakfasts and colossal lunches, had been preserved in the guide book. Certainly I must revive the fragrance of those bygone taverns and meals. But I wish the old man had left me a secret recipe with his menus.

Three postcards came out of the flap. One was a fine study by Mrs. Caleb Keene, a picture I had known ever since I was a schoolboy; Malay washerwomen at Platteklip. On the back I found the words: "Puzzling ruins here."

Another postcard showed a regatta on the Milnerton lagoon. "Old



name was Jan Biesje's Kraal – who was Jan?" ran a query in the same handwriting. A yellowing photograph was clipped to the postcard, and I was just able to recognise a thatched cottage near Milnerton, the old Rentzke's Farm dwelling. "Woltemade lived here," was the note on the back of this picture.

The third postcard was a view of the Table Mountain range, and this carried a whole list of questions in the handwriting which was now becoming familiar. "Twelve Apostles. What are their names? Who left a railway locomotive on top of Table Mountain? Worst mountain fire was in Frank Jarman's time, 1894. Where was Lady Anne Barnard's bath?

Certainly not the place they show you at Kirstenbosch."

I had not yet exhausted this packet of wonders, and the last items were more sensational than the first. A cutting from the *Cape Argus* early this century recorded the closing of more than four hundred "houses of ill-fame" in Cape Town. Another newspaper extract mentioned the "ragging case" at the Mount Nelson Hotel. A print cut from a newspaper showed a parachutist streaking down from a hot-air balloon, his 'chute having failed to open; and the scene of this desperate episode was the old Parade!

Finally I discovered a smudged page from a pocketbook and read these dramatic notes:

“Simon van der Stel was a coloured man.”

“Probable solution of George Rex mystery will be found in *George and Knysna Herald*.” (There followed a date which I could not decipher). Finally a query read: “Was the Treaty signed in the old cottage at Woodstock?”

That was all, apart from a number of marginal notes in the guide book, remarks and queries in a tiny hand which I left until I could use a magnifying glass.

Old Cape Town had surrounded me like a faint and intriguing aroma as

I sat there in my car looking down the panorama of the years.

I imagined the land even before Van Riebeeck built his mud fort on this very Parade. Lions and hippo left their tracks in the mud, steenbok and zebra grazed here. Van Riebeeck set up an eight-pounder cannon on the Parade “as a stronghold against any attempts of the savages” to rob his gardens.

Once there was an oak hedge all round the Parade and last century there were stone pines, and I wish they were all still there. Milkwood and saffron trees have been planted in the new Heerengracht, red hibiscus and flowering gums elsewhere; but the slow-growing oaks have gone for ever.

From the Parade the early settlers could see the first hospital, the first church being built. Nothing stood between them and the many dramas of Table Bay; the expected fleets, the unforeseen and tragic shipwrecks.

It was virgin veld even in the early eighteenth century. Mentzel, the German traveller, said the passages across it were so deep that wagons disappeared from sight. "Never an evening used to pass, except when the moon was shining brightly, without some falling into these passages," Mentzel went on. "The victims used often to receive serious injuries, and they were not all drunk by any means." Governor Swellengrebel instructed each burgher to send a slave to the Parade

until the whole area had been levelled.

Here on the Parade the hospitable Governor van Plettenburg arranged a camp for Captain Cook's sailors when the *Resolution* and *Adventure* anchored in the bay. Cook noted that the Cape Town of his day (nearly two centuries ago) consisted of about one thousand houses, mostly built of brick and whitened on the outside, covered with thatch "for the violence of the south east winds would render any other roof inconvenient and dangerous." The great navigator remarked that the town lived by entertaining strangers and selling them the necessities, every merchant imitating the manners and customs of the sea-faring nation he traded with.

Captain Cook brought a table with a secret drawer to Cape Town, and gave it to the Brand family, his hosts. That table is still here. Cook's captains signed their names with a diamond on a Heerengracht window. The glass has gone.

Among the famous visitors who crossed the Parade in the eighteenth century I shall mention two more. One was Lemuel Gulliver, the ship's doctor whose "Travels" still live. Gulliver spent six months at the Cape, yet failed to describe his visit. "We arrived at the Cape of Good Hope, where we landed for fresh water," Gulliver wrote, "but discovering a leak, we unshipped our goods and wintered there; for the captain falling sick of an ague,

we could not leave the Cape till the end of March."

Is it possible that Gulliver was so depressed by the winter climate that he failed to appreciate his wild and romantic surroundings? There are some who declare that Cape Town has only about sixty good days in a year, the rest being made wretched by grey skies or the fury of the south-easter. I am one of those who admire the southeaster, and years ago I lived at Blaauwberg Strand, in the teeth of the wind, summer after summer. The south-easter has a voice, and it shouts part of Cape Town's story: As for the winter days, I know how to make myself snug; though I must admit that the southern winter sometimes finds me in such places

as Barcelona, Nice or Venice. I feel well at all times in Cape Town, and that is my test. But it seems to me that Gulliver must have had an ague, like his captain.

Not long after Gulliver came Dr. Thomas Dover, whose celebrated opium powder cured my fevers and sent me back to work on several occasions. Seldom indeed does a medical prescription remain unchanged for centuries, but Dover's mixture is a triumphant survival. Dover was not only a clever doctor, but captain of a privateer. Almost a pirate in fact. He sailed in company with Woodes Rogers, and his pilot was none other than William Dampier. This was the expedition which made hundreds of thousands of pounds,

and which, incidentally, rescued Alexander Selkirk, hero of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Dover left nothing on record about his visit to Cape Town, but Woodes Rogers said of the Dutch colonists: "Their form of government, their industry and neatness is justly to be admired and imitated. I saw nothing I could blame, unless it be their severity, for which no doubt they have very good reason, tho' it seemed harsh to me, who was born with English liberty."

Open the earliest Cape Town newspapers, and the vanished scene comes gradually to life. I have seen the first issue of the *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser*, printed in 1800 in a Plein Street house. If you wanted a slave, the

advertisers gave you a wide choice. "Clever female slave, with her male child one and a half years. She is a good housemaid and well acquainted with female work in general." A display advertisement included a woodcut picture of a sturdy slave, and these details: "At house No. 47 Bree Street. Sale of slaves. One woman slave born at the Cape, capable of washing, ironing and needlework; and several men slaves, among which a perfect coachman and a tolerable good cook, the property of John Holland Esquire."

Those fragile pages give you the laughter and the tears; the sale of pickles and sweetmeats at Abraham de Smidt's house; the reward for the discovery of the practical joker

who broke open the signal house and made everyone believe that a fleet was in sight; slave girls as lottery prizes; dysentery and great mortality among Batavian troops; office of wine-taster created; execution at the foot of Lion's Rump hill of a Tulbagh farmer for murdering a fieldcornet.

Cape Town's merchants built their Commercial Exchange on the edge of the Parade in the eighteen-twenties. This was a coffee house for the business men who sold meat and vegetables to the ships that called at the "Tavern of the Seas"; it was the concert hall and ballroom and meeting-place of the town; a place with a stoep where members watched the unfolding of Cape Town's story. For seventy years

they held their heavy old-fashioned banquets there and drank the old Constantia wines. They used imported ice, and sometimes they drank sixteen toasts at one dinner.

That low white building, facing the Heerengracht, was also the town library, the auction centre where cargoes and wrecked ships were sold, the candle-lit theatre in which a flourish of trumpets sounded as the governor entered. They pulled it down in the eighteen-nineties to make way for the general post office, this link between Lord Charles Somerset and the era of lifts and telephones. Somerset, with his many country shooting-boxes. Somerset, who taxed the Cape wine to raise money for the library.

Somerset, who loved wine and women.

But it is not the corrupt Somerset period that grips me as I sit here in my car on the Parade looking down the years. I think the most enchanting years are those which are still just within reach of human memory. You imagine, perhaps, that some romantic or scandalous or tragic episode can only be found in newspaper reports or dusty pigeon-holes, and lo! there comes forward an old, old, man with clear memories of the events of his youth.

When I was a young reporter I interviewed a citizen who had reached Cape Town in the eighteen-seventies. Strange to say,

he did not confess to a nostalgia for the town of his youth. "How can one regret the passing of streets that were a desert of sand in summer and a morass in winter?" he asked me. "Only a fool enjoys walking along crude streets without pavements. Dock Road was a hideous thoroughfare of drunken sailors. Obscure, mysterious murders went undetected. The only gorgeous sight in town was the remarkable outfit worn by the undertakers, crowned by huge cocked hats."

I asked him whether there were any compensations. "Certainly not the hour-glass waists and flowing skirts," he replied. "Of course it was nice to buy wine at three pence a bottle, Cape brandy at nine pence.

Otherwise I prefer the Cape Town of today. You young fellows have inherited a sweet and lovable city – you are living in a golden age."

Yes, there are human links with the vastly different Cape Town of the past. Even as a boy I was fond of this bridging of time's gaps, and I remember very well indeed an early experience of that sort. I lived in Kotze Street in the historic area of the Gardens where some of the old estates have survived. Next door lived the Higgos, a family of Cornish origin. Old Higgo, as I regarded him (though he was not really old) used to talk to me over the garden fence; and he told me that when his father arrived in the middle of last century there was no municipal water supply. They took buckets to a spring and



kept a keen look-out at night for leopards and baboons. Buck came into their gardens and dug out the vegetables. Fowls were stolen by lynxes. These were the Higgos who owned the quarry at Higgovale and supplied Cape Town with granite for buildings and pavements.

Wherever you have mountains some of the wild life remains untouched. There are still gardens in the Cape Peninsula where the hoof-marks of steenbok and grysbok may be seen at intervals. Baboons we know only too well. But the leopard no longer leaves his pug-marks on this side of the Cape Flats. Smaller mammals are not unknown, and I shall have something to say about these creatures, some of them recent

arrivals, others older than man in this land.

Cape Town has the continuity which I miss once I pass out of the old settled Cape districts. You find this in all sorts of places. It may be a building or a gnarled vine making a cool back stoep in summer; a vine of such dimensions that its age can only be reckoned in centuries. Bree Street had an old home with a vine like that, and there was a private hotel in the Gardens where grapes were picked from a giant which, according to tradition, was more than two and a half centuries old.

In many ways Cape Town gives you the impression that the past is just round the corner. This serene old harbour has watched kings and

presidents come and go. It has not grown like the cities that cluster round gold mines, and it seems content to remain the old “Tavern of the Seas” rather than a vista of factories. Skyscrapers have arisen, but the low, white, thatched buildings have not all disappeared. Grapes and wine are sold from some of the very farms that the old Dutch settlers tilled.

Visit the backyards of Cape Town if you are seeking the past. Fronts of homes and shops are often modernised, but the fanlights and mouldings of coach-houses and servants’ quarters have remained untouched since the eighteenth century. Here are many forgotten plaster festoons of flowers and grapes.

District Six has retained a few eighteenth-century houses. There and elsewhere you may still find the small window-panes used more than two centuries ago; the larger, sunken windows of the late eighteenth century; the fanlights with lanterns, elegant pilasters beside the front door, and occasionally a pediment.

Victorian homes are certainly not rarities. Some of them look shoddy, others have wrought-iron railings of delicate design. These are the balconies Desiree Picton-Seymour draws so well, preserving memories of many an old corner of Cape Town that has since been demolished.

Now and again you see a balcony with wooden railings, like the fretwork of a Swiss chalet. Most of them are of cast-iron, for thousands of tons of these iron railings were shipped all the way from Glasgow. At one time Long Street consisted almost entirely of these lacy iron balconies with solid flower designs, and many of the buildings had the plaster fruit and elaborate cornices that went with the Glasgow ironmongery. Seen as a whole, it was not without a certain picturesque effect. And now that so many old buildings have been pulled down, the remaining iron balconies are taking on the charm belonging to rare period pieces. This ironwork may be regarded as

popular art, an essential part of Victorian Cape Town.

Edwardian balconies have the same prosperous, vulgar air, and some of them border on the fantastic. You can still see a few shops with the names of the firms incorporated in the iron designs at roof level. Cupids, eagles and griffins peep down from the slates of some Edwardian buildings.

I am not old enough to look back on the whole of this century in Cape Town, though there are many who can recall the opening years more clearly than recent decades. For such is human memory. Here are some fragments, the gaiety and the sadness and the growth that has

covered so many gracious relics of the past.

Six decades that have seen three wars cannot be counted among the happiest periods of the old town below Table Mountain. Exciting years no doubt; but all too often there has been the undertone of tragedy. The century opened in the atmosphere of war, soon to be accompanied by plague. Apart from the army, Cape Town was still a small colonial town of sixty thousand people, less than half of them white. There were no really tall buildings in 1900 and only four business houses had lifts. Cape Town's first skyscraper, the African Life Building (formerly known as the New York Mutual) was not completed until 1905.

Adderley Street in 1900 still had many buildings of two storeys. Photographs show people sauntering along the thoroughfare with their backs to the slow-moving traffic. All down the centre stood the hansoms and four-wheelers. Double-decker tram-cars had arrived.

It was not always safe and quiet, however. An old Capetonian told me of a cargo of bulls which arrived by sea in charge of American cowboys in Western dress. The bulls stampeded in Dock Road, a deaf railway shunter was tossed and killed, and the cowboys had to use their guns. Several bulls were shot in Adderley Street.

No one paid income tax in 1900. A five-roomed house in a good suburb cost forty or fifty pounds a year; but fifteen pounds a month was a high salary for a male shop assistant. Bricklayers and carpenters earned eight to ten shillings a day. You paid one shilling a pound for coffee, and two shillings and eight pence for tea. Mutton was five pence a pound and Cape brandy about five shillings a gallon. A single man could select a comfortable boarding house costing five pounds a month, with ten shillings extra for laundry. At the Mount Nelson Hotel the charge was fifteen shillings a day with all meals.

You could buy a new piano for twenty-five pounds and a gold

watch for ten guineas. Men shaved with cut-throats (price seven shillings). A silk-lined dress-suit, made to measure, was four guineas, while a tailor-made lounge suit could be ordered for fifty shillings. If you went in for the fashionable Norfolk jacket and knickers, that cost sixty shillings.

Outrageous claims were made in patent medicine advertisements, and every newspaper published columns of "secret remedies" for every serious ailment. Much space was given to horse medicines, saddle soap and harness.

Anyone who felt like a trip to England could do it for ten guineas, third class single by intermediate steamer. No passport was required.

There was a rush to settle in South Africa at that time, just as there was after the other wars of the present century. Artisans were tempted to the Cape by the offer of passages at thirty-five shillings in empty troopships going south to embark British regiments after the South African War.

Farmers were wanted, too, and this was the vision of a new life at the Cape held out to them: "There is no lord of the manor to dictate to him, no political overseer to arrange his views; he is free to come and go under the clear skies, the equal of all he meets on the market so long as he sticks to his work and pays his way."

Bonfires were lit on the Parade every Guy Fawkes Night during the early years of this century, and thousands watched the fun. Rival bands of revellers fought to seize the effigies. Any timber that would burn, even unguarded handcarts and wagons, were thrown into the flames. Old men who remember those battles and orgies of bygone fifth of November nights declare that nothing of the kind would be allowed by the police nowadays. There was too much work for the casualty wards afterwards.

Apart from a post-war depression, the year 1905 was a good normal year by which the life of Cape Town between the wars may be assessed. Many scenes rise vividly from the newspaper files, from year

books and magazines, and above all from personal narratives.

Then, as now, Cape Town people loved the waterfront and crowded the wharves for any seafaring spectacle. Sailing and rowing regattas on Table Bay drew many onlookers to the old wooden Central Jetty at the foot of Adderley Street. Cape Town lived much closer to the sea during the early decades of this century. Since the reclamation schemes the city has almost lost the sea and the breath of the sea.

A survival of slave days lingered in the Cape Town of 1945. It had long been the custom of freed slaves and other coloured people to meet at a boulder known as the “Stone” on

the slopes of Devil’s Peak every Sunday morning to discuss grievances and matters of importance to the coloured community. “Stone” meetings, said the Cape Argus in 1905, formed “a political school for grownup men.” Mr. Isaac Purcell was their white champion and meetings were fully reported. Colour bars and the laxity of morals of coloured girls and soldiers were among the subjects debated.

Every year on December 1 a thanksgiving service was held at the “Stone” to celebrate the anniversary of the abolition of slavery. Supporters of the meetings started a school for coloured children. Overseas newspapers commented on the debates. It was

an unofficial Coloured Advisory Council in the days before colour problems became acute.

Telephone services did not penetrate very far into the Cape countryside during the first decade. Cape Town and Stellenbosch, for example, were connected only by telegraph. One evening, just after the post office had closed, a well-known Stellenbosch professor died. The telegraph operator could not be found. Not a motor-car was available. Two students volunteered to ride as far as Bellville on their bicycles. From there they caught a train to Cape Town, and so the death notice reached the newspapers. Life certainly moved slowly just over half a century ago.

Cape Town's pageant of 1910 still ranks as one of the greatest organised spectacles of the century. During the memorable fortnight of dress rehearsals and actual performances, Van Riebeeck's *Dromedaris* sailed again (an old lighter in disguise) and fired her carronades; and five thousand men, women and children took part in the many gorgeous scenes.

People in Cape Town formed the cinema habit during the second decade of this century. There had been occasional shows ever since 1897, but these were flickering novelties rather than entertainments. Pioneer showmen all had their own names for the new moving pictures – veriscope, mutoscope, heliochromascope and



so on, but the name bioscope became part of the South African vocabulary. It is no longer used anywhere else in the world.

Flying was first seen in Cape Town in 1911, two years after Albert Kimmerling, the French pilot, had made the first South African flight at East London. John Weston (later Admiral Weston) was the Cape Town pioneer. He demonstrated his Farman and Bristol biplanes and carried passengers at five guineas a flip.

More impressive displays were given in December of that year by Compton Paterson and a South African pilot named Driver. I remember watching Driver land his Bleriot monoplane beside the vlei

at Muizenberg with the first “air post,” which had been put on board at Kenilworth race-course. Driver’s aircraft was a wood and canvas crate, yet the design was beautiful and he flew it with great skill. During the following year Paterson equipped a biplane of his own design with floats and took off for the first time from Table Bay. These were great events for a populace which still found a thrill on Thursday afternoons in summer by taking advantage of half-fare tram-car excursions to Camp’s Bay “and other outlying places.”

Amenities that came to Cape Town between the two world wars included Turkish baths and broadcasting. Just as gramophone parties were held in 1907, so the

early owners of radio receivers invited their friends round in September 1924, when Cape Town was enthralled by programmes which were soon to be savagely criticised.

Now look back on the uneasy year of 1938, last of the “normal years” between the wars. You could buy a block of four well-built all-electric flats (three rooms) for less than four thousand pounds or a modern four-roomed home at Three Anchor Bay for fifteen hundred, or one at Pinelands for a thousand.

Christmas gift suggestions that year included a collar attached shirt, tie, handkerchief and braces for twelve shillings. Lunch at one of the largest city restaurants cost one

shilling and sixpence. Large new American cars were being sold at under two hundred and fifty pounds, and the cheapest car on the market was under one hundred and fifty. Beer was sixpence a quart. Some consumers remembered Cape Town’s famous tickey beer, and grumbled.

Was life in Cape Town more pleasant early this century than in the streamlined city of the nineteen-sixties? No doubt the slower tempo was restful. But all this is within living memory, and you must choose your own favourite decade. It depends on your age.

My reverie went on until the noon gun shattered the visions of bygone

years. Out of my daydreams came an idea.

I walked back to the bookstall with the old guidebook, and asked the man whether he had any more such books, old Cape Town directories or earlier editions of this guide.

“That’s the last, and I should have charged you more for it,” he replied cheerfully. “Africana, they call that stuff. Valuable, so they say.” He looked as though he knew the value of every item to the last penny.

“Would you mind telling me who sold you the book?” “Against all the rules of the trade, I’m afraid,” said the bookseller. “But the old gentleman died some time ago. People who collect that sort of stuff

don’t usually sell it. I bought his books from the widow.”

So there I was with a queer legacy of mysteries and other fragments of life in Old Cape Town. The mysteries included the identity of the man who had thrown up a torch, as it were, for some unknown heir to seize. I felt that this particular mystery was the one most likely to remain unsolved.

All right, I am ready and eager to carry on the search and hear what the old men have to say. But I wish that I could have examined the rest of that unknown old man’s library. You cannot have too many clues when you set out to turn the key of time.



## Chapter Two THE LIVING LINKS

*Very old are we men;  
Our dreams are tales  
Told in dim Eden  
By Eve's nightingales.*

WALTER DE LA MARE

ONCE a proud old Malay brought a family group photograph to my office, a rarity I was glad to examine. It portrayed four generations, the great-grandfather with his little white beard holding a baby on his knee.

As you know, I like to hear what old men have to say. If they are centenarians, so much the better. The memories of very old people illuminate the bygone years and put flesh on the dry bones of historical fact. They can repeat the tales of their fathers and grandfathers so that the remote past comes to life. Never will I cease to marvel at the way former times shake hands with latter.

When I was a young reporter, asking old men for their memories of the Cape Town of last century, you could have found a crowd of people who had watched the Alabama steaming into Table Bay. Two years later the great gale of 1865 imprinted its tragedies on



Many fine old characters flourish in the Malay quarter

their memories. That generation has certainly passed on.

Fairly late last century there were centenarians who might in their youth have heard at first hand tales of the Van der Stels; and tales of Van Riebeeck himself at second-hand. I have met people with fragmentary memories of the abolition of slavery and the Great Trek.

Many fine old characters flourish in the Malay quarter. Now that the medical school at the University of Cape Town is making a special study of longevity I hope the Malay quarter as a laboratory will not be overlooked. The small eastern colony which has rooted itself at Africa's southern tip appears to

produce old people and centenarians more often than one would expect. Years ago, after visiting Tristan da Cunha, I suggested that the lonely island might hold the secret of long life; but that peaceful scene has been painfully disturbed. Now I must turn to the Malays and others who have flourished in the Cape far beyond the three score years and ten.

Let me start with certain Cape Methuselahs who lived before my time, the sort of people I am sorry to have missed. Lichtenstein, the German doctor who came to the Cape as tutor to the son of General Janssens, recorded the death in 1791 of one Schalk van der Merwe at the age of one hundred and eight. This man was the son of a settler

who had arrived in Van Riebeeck's time, so that father and son together spanned the long years from the early settlement almost to the end of the eighteenth century. That was a remarkable achievement when the expectation of life was so short that most men were old at fifty.

Lichtenstein, early last century, visited a Mr. Milde's farm in the Cape, and there he met a Malay slave who declared that he had left Java when General van Oudtshoorn was governor there (1691 to 1704). On the first day of January 1801 this slave had offered his best wishes to his master on the opening of the new century; and he had informed his master that this was the second time in his life that he seen another century ushered in. The slave

gave a description of Cape Town in 1701: "only a few small houses, no church and a wooden castle." Lichtenstein estimated his age at one hundred and twenty years.

One hundred and twenty is such a great age that some research workers regard it as "not proven". And in the period when births were not registered, that is the only possible attitude.

The *Cape Town Mail*, in the middle of last century, discovered a Malay at Simonstown who was said to be one hundred and twenty, and added: "Such an age is not uncommon among the coloured people". Incidentally, Simonstown has been the home of a number of aged characters.

Brutus, a Malay cooper of one hundred and five, died in Cape Town in 1867, “in full possession of his faculties”. During the same period the Pniel missionaries stated that a coloured woman had died there at the age of one hundred and thirteen. She had a daughter of eighty-five.

Richard Haughton, who died in Cape Town in 1896, had fought (said the *Cape Argus*) at the Battle of Waterloo. But this old soldier was only ninety-five. He must have been a bugler or drummer boy. This veteran complained that although he had survived the battle to become one of the oldest men in the world, nothing much had happened to him since Waterloo.

Early this century an ex-slave named Cupido Isak, living on the Cape Flats, was interviewed by a clergyman who estimated the man’s age at one hundred and twenty. Cupido remembered Salt River as a mere outspan where they had to light huge fires at night to keep the jackals away. The old man was still at work, cutting wood on the Flats and carrying it into Mowbray on his back.

Octogenarians who lived in Cape Town at the turn of the century will surely remember Otto Landsberg, musician, artist and snuff-maker. Born in Germany in 1803, he arrived in Cape Town with his family when he was fifteen. He saw the town grow from a cluster of houses



under the mountain to a city with many suburbs.

Landsberg's father lived to seventy-nine, his mother to ninety-three. One brother lived to ninety-six and another was killed when he fell off a wagon at eighty-eight. Otto Landsberg could easily recall the marshalling of the slaves on tables on the Parade, so that "points" for and against might be noted. He himself bought a cook there for six hundred rix-dollars.

For over half a century Otto Landsberg controlled his own business. With Mr. J. G. Steytler he started a musical society, and played the violin until (at ninety-eight) his fingers became too stiff. Otto also made pen and ink

sketches which are treasured by Africana collectors. Married twice, he had thirteen children. On his hundredth birthday a large portrait of this patriarch with flowing white beard was exhibited on the Cape Town railway station. He resembled the author John Ruskin.

Otto Landsberg ate well and slept well, and complained only of missing the many friends he had outlived. On Sundays he remained at home, reading sermons and hymns. He died in 1905, one hundred and two years of age. Landsberg was often asked for the secret of longevity, and his answer was one which modern medical science may possibly deplore. "Take snuff," advised this ancient snuff maker.

One old friend of Landsberg's who died almost on the same day was Mr. Charles Pritchard (aged ninety-two) of Sea Point. Born on St. Helena, this veteran had sat on Napoleon's knee. He attended the long funeral service when Napoleon was buried. That day the cannon roared their salutes from six in the morning until six at night.

Pritchard, consumptive in his youth, settled at the Cape in 1835 for his health and soon made a complete recovery. He had served briefly as a militia officer in St. Helena. Under the peculiar regulations of the period he became entitled to a full-pay pension, which he drew for over seventy years. Pritchard fought in the War of Tbe Axe. He was elected to the

Old Cape House. When he died he was described as "the last survivor in South Africa of the English East India Company".

One of Charles Pritchard's sons was the surveyor who gave his name to Pritchard Street, Johannesburg. When I spent a month in St. Helena in 1954 I went to tea with Miss Pritchard, the last member of the family on the island, living in the romantic old residence called Cambrian Lodge near the end of Jamestown valley.

Another aged St. Helenan, contemporary of Pritchard, was Mr. G. B. Bennett, who lived at Waterhof in the Gardens for many years. He was at Napoleon's funeral as a boy of five.

Bennett was sent to school in England and travelled in the same cabin as Saul Solomon, founder of the Cape Argus. While he was returning to St. Helena in a sailing ship, a pirate vessel attacked them and young Bennett stood ready to defend himself with a cutlass. However, the pirate sheared off and Bennett reached St. Helena safely. There he married Charles Pritchard's sister.

It was in July 1840 that the body of Napoleon was exhumed. The enclosure was guarded, and very few permits to enter were issued. Bennett dodged the sentries among the trees, however, and watched the soldiers breaking into the masonry of the tomb and raising the heavy coffin with a windlass.

Bennett had served in the army on St. Helena like his friend Pritchard and he came to the Cape to take part in the eastern frontier wars. He bought Waterhof in 1870. Before long he gained local fame as an amateur astronomer and botanist. He was the first to identify Findlay's comet in 1882.

When Bennett left England there were no railways, and a steamship was a rarity. He lived in five reigns, from George III to Edward VII. He had ten children, fourteen grandchildren and fourteen great-grandchildren. Bennett outlived three sons and three sons-in-law. When he died in 1908 he had reached the same age as Charles Pritchard – ninety-two.

Cape Town once knew a man who may have reached the age of one hundred and twenty-one years. Before I go on, let me say again that scientists are extremely sceptical about such ages, and with good reason. Late last century there were doctors who doubted whether any person had lived to be a hundred; and many in Britain were surprised when Mr. W. J. Thom, deputy librarian to the House of Lords, proved conclusively that two men and two women had passed the century.

Some very old people are inclined to add a few years for good measure. Now and again the lives of a father and son with the same names are telescoped, and then the addition may give a remarkable

result. Human credulity is vast. There must be corroborative evidence, and this is hard to find.

What is the extreme limit of human life? The question holds deep interest, and it remains a deep mystery. In a previous work<sup>1</sup> I put forward the claims made on behalf of Ramonotwane, a Bechuana, who may have been about one hundred and thirty years old. No less an authority than Dr. Robert Broom, D.Sc., F.R.S., credited Ramonotwane with a century and a half of life, but this I doubt.

Mr. Thom, the librarian I have mentioned, quoted a Danish sailor

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<sup>1</sup> *There's a Secret Hid Away*, published by Howard Timmins

named Christen Jacobsen Drakensberg, who was supposed to have lived from 1626 to 1772. Thom thought there was evidence in favour of this stupendous life-span of one hundred and forty-six years.

Recent examples are more interesting to my mind because the proof has not vanished in the mists of time. Let us consider the man of one hundred and twenty-one. Abraham Peters was the name of this American negro who arrived in Cape Town in 1806 as servant to Colonel Fitzroy of the 72nd Highlanders. Abraham's age on arrival is unknown, but he could hardly have been under fifteen. Abraham Peters died of old age in Potchefstroom in 1912. Dr. Ian D.

Dickson, who signed the death certificate, was naturally fascinated by this example of longevity, and did his best to check the facts. Peters had worked as caretaker at a mission church until a few days before his death. Sight and hearing were good. His story was known to many people in Potchefstroom, and Dr. Dickson put this forward seriously as a fairly well authenticated life span of about one hundred and twenty years.

My favourite centenarian, linked forever with the Cape, was Mrs. Alys Fane Trotter, author, artist and poet. Her husband was stationed in Cape Town at the end of last century as government engineer. Mrs. Trotter rode about the countryside on her bicycle visiting

the old homesteads and describing them with a charm which no one had equalled. She died in 1961, shortly before her hundredth birthday.

Many of the Cape Malays, I remarked earlier, seem to possess the secret of long life. Is it their religion? They do not touch alcohol, they fast regularly, and when they prostrate themselves daily they are really carrying out a set of useful physical exercises. Their pilgrimages to Mecca also seem to keep them going, and must act as a tonic to the many elderly people who take part.

“Ouma Gaartjie,” a great character in the Malay Quarter, died shortly before World War II in her hun-

dredth year. Her brother was a priest, and she helped him to run a school. Only a month before her death she attended a Malay wedding. She was regarded as an authority on ritual.

One afternoon while she was still able to see and hear and talk to her family she called everyone round her. “I am too old to live any longer,” she told them. Then she folded her hands as prescribed in the Islamic death ritual and passed away. Her funeral drew thousands of mourners, and all the Peninsula mosques held services,

At that period there was a municipal pensioner, Hadji Gabriel, who had drawn his five pounds a month for thirty-nine years. He was

ninety-nine. His son Tarief, aged sixty-nine, was also a pensioner. Gabriel had joined the waterworks staff when Cape Town was administered from the Old Town House in Greenmarket Square. Two men kept the water flowing for the whole town. Then came the day in 1883 when Gabriel was able to find a job for his son Tarief. The young turncock took over such strenuous duties as rushing to fires with the horse-drawn brigade to see that the water ran freely.

Another remarkable old Malay who was alive just before World War II was Gariel Hendricks. He lived in Woodstock and claimed to be one hundred and eighteen years old. I have his portrait before me; a white-haired ancient wearing a fez

and fingering his beads. Hendricks asserted: "I was seventeen years old when Queen Victoria came to the throne. I well remember the great feast that was held on the Parade in Cape Town."

Was it that celebration or another one that the old man remembered? Hendricks was firm in all statements regarding his age, and gave chapter and verse. He declared that he was born in slavery on June 19, 1820, and that his parents were owned by the Cloetes. His first son was born about the time that the Voortrekkers were leaving the Cape.

Hadji Basie Rasdien, who announced his one hundred and third birthday soon after World

War II, claimed to have been present in 1879 when the Prince Imperial of France was killed in the Zulu War. Rasdien relied on herbs, "Old Dutch" medicines, snuff and cheroots to keep him well.

I think the last man in Cape Town with personal memories of the Alabama may have been Hadii Abdurahman Johnson, who died in 1955 at the reputed age of one hundred and five. Johnson knew the Castle when the sea beat against the walls in winter gales. Johnson was a hansom-cab driver. Among his fares were Cecil Rhodes, Dr. Jameson, Lord Kitchener and "Onze Jan" Hofmeyr. He received a cable of congratulation from Queen Elizabeth on his hundredth birthday. In his old age he was

known to the children of the Malay Quarter as "Ou Alie Bama."

Until fairly recent years the pilgrimage to Mecca was an ordeal for young and old. Aircraft have solved the problem. I heard a few years ago of a Cape Moslem named Nizamodien who made the pilgrimage at the age of ninety-seven. He knew the Koran by heart. I am glad to say that this devout old man passed the century mark.

Mrs. Ragiema Friede, who died on the Cape Flats in 1956, claimed one hundred and fourteen years. She fixed her age by the fact that she sold fruit on the Parade before the railway was built. The first locomotive was landed in 1859, so perhaps her story was true, though



it did not necessarily make her as old as one hundred and fourteen. Most centenarians pride themselves on their wonderful health. But poor old Mrs. Rowyda Brinkman, a Malay who was interviewed in Schotsche Kloof on her hundredth birthday not long ago, exclaimed: "I feel horrible." She once worked for President Kruger's sister in Pretoria, and had waited on "Oom Paul" at table.

Hadji Mogadis Regal, a Cape Town tailor, could thread a needle without glasses at the age of ninety-seven. Perhaps the achievement of Yusuf Sampson, a Malay plasterer, may be regarded as more remarkable. When he died in 1962, aged one hundred and four, he had outlived ten wives and

twenty-one of his twenty-two children.

Mrs. Regina Sampson of Paarl, one hundred and two in 1963, lived for many years on a farm near Paarl owned by Cecil Rhodes. Her husband was the farm foreman. They were both on the platform when the funeral train bearing the body of Rhodes passed through Paarl on the way to Bulawayo.

I could go on longer with tales of long-lived Malays, but not all were as picturesque as those I have mentioned. Now for some other memorable old people,

A prominent Capetonian who undoubtedly watched the landing of the first railway engine was Mr. W. R. Ball, ninety-four when he died

soon after World War II. He lived to see that very engine become a museum-piece on the Cape Town station. Mr. Ball attended a meeting of the South African Public Library in 1946, when he had been a member for seventy years. He had watched the laying of the library foundation stone in 1860. At ninety-three Mr. Ball was still walking long distances and reading voraciously.

Mr. H. F. van Eyssen of Wynberg, one hundred and two in 1955, was an old citizen who watched the first train leaving Cape Town for Wynberg. He missed the Alabama but not the great gale.

I have a copy of a scarce work, printed for private circulation, on

the life of Mr. Arnold Wilhelm Spilhaus. For decades it was his ambition to become a centenarian. He achieved it in 1945, and died the following year. The anxieties and stresses of a long business career in Cape Town never affected his health. "Keep in harness and don't worry" was his advice.

Mr. Spilhaus reached Table Bay before the docks were finished. No pavements had been built as there was no danger of being run over. Even in Adderley Street the buildings had stoeps.

Life in the last quarter of last century was pleasant, according to Mr. Spilhaus. People went to the Parade on Saturdays not so much to buy as to meet everyone else and be

amused. So casual were the police that when Mr. Spilhaus reported a theft, and inquired days later whether any progress had been made, the chief of police replied: "By Jove, I forgot all about it."

Cape Town's best-loved centenarian of recent years was that great collector for charity and visitor of the sick, Mrs. Caroline Keppel-Jones. Her memories of people included Charles Dickens, who often called at the London home of her father, the Hon. E. J. Salusbury, M.P. She went to school with the novelist's daughter, Kate Dickens.

As a child of five Mrs. Keppel-Jones attended the funeral of Wellington, the "Iron Duke" of the Napoleonic Wars. (Wellington, as

Lt. Col. Wellesley, had visited Cape Town in 1797). Mrs. Keppel-Jones died in 1949, four days after her hundredth birthday. "Take plenty of exercise," she advised. "Eat simple and regular meals. Always look on the cheerful side of life."

Mrs. Jane Biggs of Clifton (who died at one hundred and three in 1951) gave some reassuring advice on longevity. "A contented mind is a continuous feast," she declared. "If you worry and fuss you just get wrinkled. Do not fear growing old, for you can enjoy all your years as they come along."

Mrs. Marian (Mutti) Marloth told her friends that she relied on daily exercise. At ninety she touched her

toes a dozen times every morning soon after rising. But I think the years she spent on the veld with her famous botanist husband must have helped. Mrs. Marloth died in 1962, aged ninety-six.

Another very old lady was Mrs. Helen Paterson, who died in the same month as Mrs. Marloth at the age of one hundred and two. She was the widow of a South African banker who lived to ninety-nine and drew his pension for more years than he had worked. The bank presented Mrs. Paterson with a cheque for one hundred guineas on her hundredth birthday. She was then still looking after her home and her husband.

Several old people of the nineteen-fifties have remained in my memory because of unusual remarks they made. There was Mrs. Marie Dodson (ninety-two) of Observatory who recalled that her great-grandfather had died on the guillotine. And then there was Mrs. N. G. A. Albertyn of Simonstown, who travelled to Simonstown by Cape cart in the days when drivers had to pay toll. She was there when the Duke of Edinburgh visited the naval port, and as there were no street lamps, everyone put candles in their windows. That lights up the past for you.

I like the story of the Hottentot, one David Abrahams, who claimed to be one hundred and eighteen years of age. He revisited Worcester in

1955 after one hundred and one years, and commented: “I don’t know this place – everything has changed except the blue mountains of the Langeberg.”

It was in 1956 that a white-bearded Xhosa walked into Port Elizabeth. He, too, noticed great changes, for he said that he had not been there since the days when the 1820 Settlers arrived!

Another old person who remembered pioneer days was Mrs. Hester Steenberg of Tiervlei, who gave her age in 1957 as one hundred and fifteen. Her parents were slaves. She was acting as nursemaid in the Oudtshoorn district about a century ago when she was chased by wild Bushmen.

The child in her charge was nearly struck by a poisoned arrow.

I am rather more impressed by the story of Mrs. Spaaselina Bruyntjes. In May 1958 she produced a family document showing that she was born on the farm Groot Paternoster (near Saldanha) on March 5, 1845. That made her one hundred and thirteen. She had a young sister of one hundred.

Mrs. Bruyntjes said that her mother had been a slave. She had thirteen children, and lived in the Paternoster area all her life. In 1958 she was still walking four miles from her home near Cape Columbine lighthouse to Paternoster village every week to do her shopping.

Vigour appears to be the great characteristic of those who reach ninety and one hundred. Either you are active or you do not make the grade. I used to know Mr. Fred Steer, the Cape Town auctioneer who died in 1958 at ninety-one. He drove his car all over South Africa and Rhodesia. I should say that he crawled all over those countries, for he seldom exceeded fifteen miles an hour. But wherever he went he carried tree seedlings and saplings, and planted them by the roadside in places needing shade. Many of Steer's trees live on, monuments to one of the most useful hobbies a man can enjoy,

Another tree-planter who passed ninety was Mr. Jan A. Meyer (nicknamed "Jan Fiskaal") who

served the George municipality for many years as water controller. Mr. Meyer filled his pockets with acorns and planted the famous oak avenues of George. Back in 1895 he accompanied a deputation to Cape Town to urge the extension of the railway from Worcester to George.

A very elderly motorist was Mr. Charles Levett of Clifton Steps, Clifton. This tall man often climbed the one hundred and thirty-seven steps to his son's house when he was ninety. And at ninety he went on a two thousand mile motor-drive all by himself. He did not smoke, but he did like a drink.

Mr. T. J. von Wiese of Kenilworth described his rules of health on his

ninety-ninth birthday not long ago. "I walk nine hundred miles a year and keep my brain at work by composing music," said Mr. von Wiese. "Every day I smoke two large cheroots and drink two brandies and soda."

I can do without the cheroots, but like Mr. von Wiese I like brandy and wine – and perhaps a solitary pink gin before lunch. However, I have still to prove that I am right, whereas Mr. von Wiese cannot be contradicted. Let me add that Mr. von Wiese played tennis until he was seventy-seven. At eighty-eight he was so badly injured in a road accident that everyone despaired of his life. Nevertheless, his broken skull, smashed pelvis, broken arm and leg all mended. Mr. von Wiese

resumed his long walks, and his cheroots.

As far back as 1920 I became aware of a Cape Town character known even then as "Knickerbockers", a Victorian ghost who clung to the clothes of his youth. He died in 1962 at the age of ninety, a mystery man if ever there was one.

"Knickerbockers" always wore a broad-rimmed yet sedate felt hat with bound edges, a Norfolk jacket and the famous knickerbockers, stockings and boots. With his mild face, blue eyes and short goatee beard, he would never have caused any comment but for his outmoded clothes.

He wore each suit until it fell apart. Kindly people offered to buy him a new outfit, little knowing that they were talking to a well-to-do eccentric. "Knickerbockers" refused all offers courteously and went on his lonely way.

Suddenly he would be seen resplendent in a new tweed suit cut exactly to the old pattern. At such times he would stop beside every public mirror in Cape Town to admire himself. I cannot tell you how many times the metamorphosis occurred, but for half a century many thousands of people must have remarked: "Old 'Knickerbockers' has got a new suit of clothes".

"Knickerbockers" used Stuttafords as his club. He took his morning and afternoon tea there, and spent many hours outside the restaurant in a comfortable chair reading the magazines and newspapers. He also patronized the grocery department. One day I was behind him at the turnstile and noticed that he seemed to be living on condensed milk. I tried to make conversation with him in the hope of hearing his story, but that was one of my failures. Only after his death did I learn that his name was Richard William Mitford Miller, and that he had been a member of the old Cape civil service.

"Nickerbockers" owned a large house in Breda Street, using one small room and letting the rest of



the building. His tenants knew little about him, for he was a hermit and he never allowed anyone to enter his room. On Sundays he remained there playing his violin and singing hymns. Not a happy life, but this strange bachelor was never seriously ill until his heart gave in. Then he collapsed in the street and was carried to his room. He died a few days later.

Trustees of his estate declared that he was wealthy. They searched the little room, unfolded hundreds of newspapers. "Knickerbockers" had left no will. Nor had he revealed to anyone the secret of living to ninety.

Papers filed with the Master of the Supreme Court showed that

"Knickerbockers" left an estate of about sixteen thousand pounds. Two nephews, a niece and a grand-niece were mentioned as the relatives who would inherit the estate.

After the funeral it was rumoured that "Knickerbockers" had once been the public executioner at the Cape and this was published in one of the newspapers. I happen to know that the rumour was untrue. The place where I first set eyes on "Knickerbockers" was the old Caledon Square magistrates' court. He was pointed out to me then as a character, but the police would have known it if he had ever been a hangman, and there was no mention of any such grim occupation.

So many rules have been laid down by centenarians that you can really take your choice of any diet and any drink in moderation. I must quote Mr. Jacob Ruiters of Athlone, however, for he reached one hundred and one not long ago on an inexpensive menu of barley bread, mealies and pumpkin.

Oldest white man in South Africa when he died in 1963, according to the newspapers, was Mr. Joao ("Portuguese Johnny") Marnus of Bellville, a genuine one hundred and eleven. His date of birth was given on the Portuguese document which he had in 1898 when he landed in Cape Town. Portuguese Johnny said that he remembered Louis Napoleon reigning in France. He worked in Cape Town as road labourer and

gardener, retiring about twenty years ago. Once a year, on his birthday, he drank a glass of brandy.

Centenarians must expect to outlive their friends, but I am really sorry for the centenarian, like Mrs. Maria Davids of Elsie's River, who loses all her children. Mrs. Davids was still doing her own cooking, sweeping, washing and ironing at one hundred and two. She had outlived not only her twenty brothers and sisters, but also her own husband and children.

I have no doubt that some parts of the world encourage longevity, and the dweller in Cape Town seems to fall within one of these magic areas. Heredity plays a great part in the matter, of course, but it is not

the only factor. Dr. Robert Broom (whose research work I mentioned earlier) discussed longevity when he reached the age of eighty. He pointed out that neither of his parents had reached old age; in fact, he was the first member of the family to celebrate an eightieth birthday. Broom recalled that he had been a sickly child, suffering from bronchitis every winter. In later years he had been an asthmatic, but he had discovered the cause in Cape Town and cured himself.

Broom complained that doctors were not trained in the art of preserving health. He thought that everyone who lived in a reasonable way should reach ninety or a hundred. The secret of longevity was to

be found in a contented mind, a good religion or philosophy, and a serious, useful hobby. Research provided some people with unending happiness. Scientists, including the bachelors, lived long. I may add that Broom was almost a total abstainer. He took brandy only as a medicine, and he never smoked. Broom lived to eighty-five. His widow reached ninety-nine.

I often think of Captain Adrian Zeeder, a fine old sailor man who came to the newspaper office when he retired from the sea in 1926 and talked to me about his adventures all over the world. It came as a pleasant shock when I read in 1963, that Captain Zeeder had just cele-

brated his one hundredth birthday in Monte Carlo.

“Men do not usually die; they kill themselves,” remarked Montaigne. No one looks forward to old age, though most people hope to live long. The active centenarians set us an example and show that it can be done.

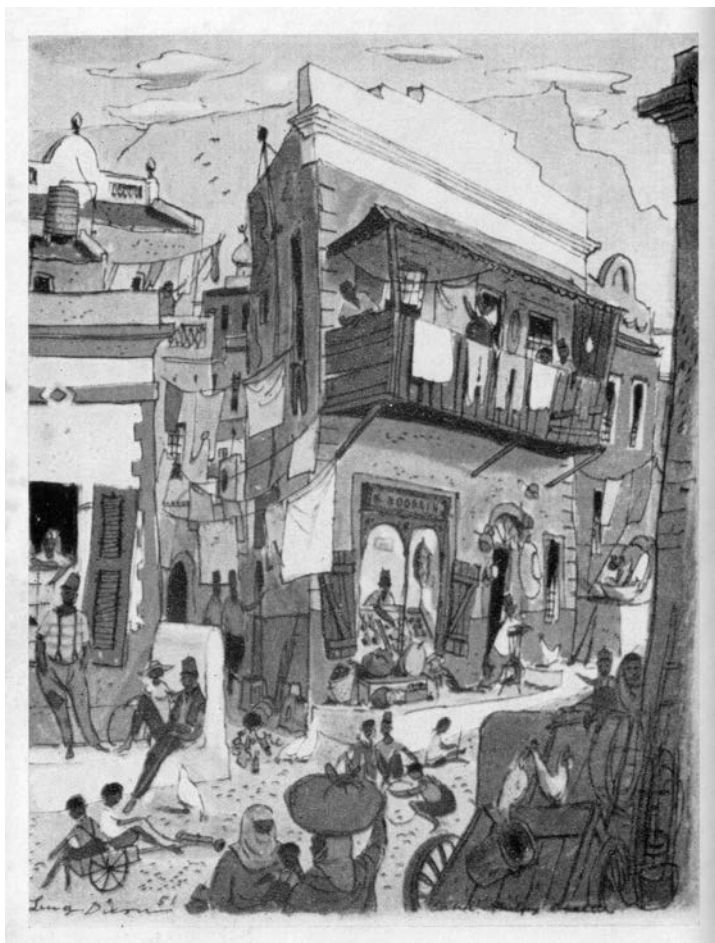
### **Chapter Three**

#### **LOST OR FORGOTTEN**

EVERY city hides something of its past and uncovers rich gifts or romantic fragments as the years roll by. Such discoveries bring the "Tavern of the Seas" to life so vividly that the old town can be seen and almost heard. Cape Town has revealed scraps of history much older than its own three centuries, and there may be more to come. Now and again it has given up something of cash value, hoarded coins, buried gold or antique treasures. When I was a reporter, many strange objects were brought to the newspaper office by hopeful people. Often I hurried off to some excavation where after long years in darkness the sunlight fell on

unexpected finds. Never did I set eyes on a lost fortune, but always I revelled in the stories or the mysteries I saw before me.

Naturally the seeker of prehistory has the widest field, but that is not my theme. I have seen the bones of whales found far inland, reminders of the days when the Cape Peninsula was an island. Prehistoric animals roamed the beaches; and I met scientists who thought the sands of Table Bay might hold the secret of human origin. Strandloper and Bushman skulls and implements were fascinating in their way. I remember rushing out to a quarry where the foreman had found a number of primitive Bushman hand-axes, points and scrapers. He made me a present of the whole collection,



I know a keen dealer who searched the slums of Cape Town, making remarkable discoveries in unexpected places

and I used these stones as paper-weights for years.

However, it is the unsuspected relic of civilised man that moves me deeply. A rusty sword uncovered by the south-east gales in a dune on the far side of Table Bay some years ago was identified as a Portuguese rapier of the fifteenth century. Don Francisco d'Almeida and his men were cut up by the Hottentots in 1501, and this was clearly a weapon used in that fight in which d'Almeida and sixty of his men were killed.

Portuguese explorers left inscribed pillars called *padrões* to mark their discoveries, and one or two of these have been pieced together in recent years. English, Dutch, French and Danish merchantmen and privateers

called at Table Bay and placed letters under "post office stones" bearing the names of masters and ships. About twenty of these stones have been recovered by men digging foundations or repairing drains. All of them were found in or close to the Adderley Street that was once the Heerengracht canal. A stream ran into the bay from Table Mountain. Ships anchored close inshore, in the lee of a great sand dune, and sent their crews to the stream to fill the water-casks. Most of the stones were found near the old watering place.

Robben Island was also visited by these early voyagers. There is reason to believe that Captain William Keeling and others left their letters on the island, but no "post office" stones have come to light there so

far. Keeling, early in the seventeenth century, found some fat sheep on Robben Island and left his lean sheep in their place. Keeling was the captain who marooned ten convicts from the Old Bailey on the island, hoping they would build up a useful settlement. Others caught seals there, and made lamp-oil, and took on ballast and fresh water. Robben Island has yielded some interesting coins, gold and silver, and the sort of scraps you would expect to find in a graveyard of the sea. I look forward to more discoveries.

It is in Cape Town's old seafaring streets, once washed by the sea, that queer finds are still made. Dock Road covered a seawall and a blockhouse, built without cement in the early Dutch days. "We find

bones most often – skulls and bones," the foreman of a drainage gang once told me. "Now and again there are old cannon and cannon balls, antique bottles and a few coins. Never enough coins, of course. Once I dug up a skeleton wearing leg-irons. That was near Gallows Hill, so it may have been a man who was hanged there."

One old Cape Town landmark, demolished just before World War II, was the Old Somerset Hospital at the corner of Chiappini and Prestwich Streets. Ten skeletons were found under the stoep. The hospital was built by Dr. Bailey in 1818 at his own expense; but the place gained a sinister reputation later, and it had the atmosphere of a penitentiary rather than a haven of



recovery. No one could account for the skeletons under the stoep, though it is possible that the hospital was built on the site of a Dutch East India Company's cemetery.

Skulls go to the anatomy department of the Cape Town University. Hundreds of specimens may be examined there, some of them relics of people who roamed the Cape beaches centuries before Van Riebeeck and the first Dutch settlers landed.

Anthropologists were especially interested in a skeleton found in 1936 when Riebeeck Street was dug up. Professor Raymond Dart identified Caucasoid features (those found in the European races) and

also more primitive traits. The burial place was in sea sand and the skull appeared to have rested there for thousands of years. No one could explain this half-breed who had died so long before the first white people reached the Cape.

When very old buildings are pulled down in Cape Town there is usually a story for the newspapers. Coins fall through the floorboards. A carpenter made a collection of this sort of money, ranging from Dutch guilders to a large English halfpenny dated 1732 and a Queen Victoria shilling of 1874 depicting the queen wearing a "pony-tail" hair style.

Foundation stones are always lifted carefully and hopefully because of

the valuable oddments placed there by the owners of the building long ago. For example, the Nieuwe Kerk building in Leeuwen Street, demolished in 1961, gave up not only some newspapers of 1833, well-preserved and worthless, but also a box of coins including a gold sovereign and two half-sovereigns.

A rather different assortment lay below the Opera House foundation stone from November 1891 until the building was pulled down forty-five years later. Besides the usual newspapers there was a set of coins, from a halfpenny to an 1889 sovereign. The sealed lead casket also contained bottles of sherry, olive oil and grain, and a message of goodwill. I wonder how many

more Pandora's boxes there are below the streets of Cape Town?

Beach pavilions offer the largest hauls of coins, for many bathers drop something through the cracks into the sand. When the Fish Hoek bathing pavilion was removed in 1955, small boys staked claims, sifted the sand, and recovered every coin from halfpennies to half-crowns. Once the building was rat-infested, and in a rat's nest the young treasure-hunters discovered the remains of a ten shilling note.

Keen-eyed schoolboys have reaped other rewards. It was in a small sandy cove near Camps Bay about ten years ago that a party of boys gathering bait found a number of Kruger coins. They were silver,

bearing dates from 1893 to 1897. No one could explain this little treasure.

Camps Bay was the scene of an earlier treasure hunt, when thirty-three George III pennies were dug up in a garden behind the Marine Hotel. Naturally they looked for more, but no more were found. It was suggested that an old house had stood on the site of the garden, and the pennies had slipped through crevices in the floor.

Boys at Bellville were digging in their school vegetable garden when they found Kruger gold and silver coins in a tin. The police took charge of this "treasure trove" for six months, and then, as there was

no claimant, the money was handed back to the boys.

One hundred men were placed on relief work during a lean period thirty years ago, and they were kept busy for months levelling Green Point Common for sports' fields. The dreary task of excavation suddenly became more interesting when a man found that his pick had gone through a solid gold watch chain. Digging brought a fine gold watch to the surface. An English golden guinea piece of the eighteenth century came up a few days later; probably an ornament which had been fixed to the watch-chain. Other diggers found money and notes, and there was a fairly large haul of silver forks.

The man who dug up an iron “treasure chest” which was found to contain horse-shoes was not so happy about it. Races were held on Green Point Common for many years. It was a prisoner-of-war camp during the South African War, and there was also a military remount depot there at that period. In all probability the Boer prisoners hid the money, while the British soldiers buried the horse-shoes.

Among the less valuable coins found at various times have been the old “tokens” issued by Cape Town firms and certain public bodies. Collectors like to have these relics, but they do not fetch high prices.

Wine merchants issued tokens to solve the bottle problem. Police

canteens, the tramways, stores, the gas company and others put into circulation tokens of silver, copper, aluminium, bronze, brass, nickel, white metal, celluloid and bone. Two hundred and forty sets of token coins marked “City of Cape Town Catering Department” were found under a pile of junk in a City Hall storeroom a few years ago. Old officials remembered that the tokens were used in the pier restaurant owing to a shortage of small change during World War I. All the museums in the country were supplied with sets of these tokens, and genuine collectors were given sets free of charge.

Stamp collectors from many lands have visited a house at Simonstown in search of rarities, but I never heard

of a dramatic find there. The house itself is a remarkable sight, for it is papered with millions of stamps.

That is Bay View House, occupied for many years by Mr. Abraham Thomas, a shopkeeper. Mr. Thomas was not a philatelist. Early this century he started collecting stamps for the sole purpose of covering the walls of his house. Customers helped him, and after thirteen years he drew up the designs for his bedroom.

Not only the walls but the ceiling were adorned with swans, roses, arum lilies and other flowers, all composed of stamps. The designs were mounted on stiff sheets and pasted in position. When the bedroom was finished he had run

out of stamps, for more than forty-nine thousand had gone into the intricate designs.

However, the customers brought in another half a million stamps, and so Mr. Thomas was able to paper the hall in the same way. This was a more formidable task, but by 1922 he had completed it. If there was a Cape triangular in this collection, the world's strangest album, I never heard of it. Mr. Thomas was interested only in patterns.

Anchors were found underground when a store was demolished in Exchange Place a decade ago, and one eighteenth-century specimen went to the South African Museum. The moat at the Castle has yielded

old Dutch pottery with raised designs.

Mowbray police station, the oldest in the Cape Peninsula, was pulled down shortly after World War II, and a small, grim panorama of the past was discovered. Coffin handles, bones and small Batavian bricks were found in the ground behind the police station, and there were a number of Dutch East India Company coins of no great value. Leg-irons and other relics of past cruelty were among the items recovered.

Sometimes the opening of a treasure chest spoils a romantic story. I am thinking now of the Van Lier legend. Dr. Helperus van Lier was a Cape Town preacher of the

late eighteenth century, a man of such eloquence that women became hysterical during his fiery sermons. He left two sons who were bachelors; and it was believed that they were rich. Commander Maurice Green, whose great-aunt married into the Van Lier family, could not tell me where the money had come from, for preachers do not usually possess great wealth. Nevertheless, there were the two sons, living as hermits, but with an old kist which was said to be crammed with valuables. When both the sons had passed on, relatives opened the kist. It was packed with stones.

Antique collectors who knew the value of furniture and brass, old Cape silver and porcelain, were often

rewarded in the past. Even today there are profits to be made by those who remember the expert's advice: "Look for beauty and beauty only."

Members of the Van Rhee de van Oudtshoorn family once possessed some Chinese hawthorn ginger jars left by the old Governor van Oudtshoorn, who was the first of that name to settle at the Cape. These jars were of an incomparable blue, a deep, translucent blue of such loveliness that the colour seemed to throb. One set of ginger jars came out of the oven, and the Chinese artist was never able to achieve a replica.

Three of these unique vases were found in Holland early this century, and fetched one thousand pounds

apiece. Van Oudtshoorns at the Cape sold the last one they could find at a high price many years ago, and this is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Lofts and cellars, old boxes and cupboards have been ransacked since then, but the Van Oudtshoorns have found no more thousand pound ginger jars.

"Look for beauty and beauty only." I knew a keen dealer who searched the Malay quarter and the slums of Cape Town, making remarkable discoveries in unexpected places. Built into the wall of a Chinese laundry he found an exquisite cupboard surmounted by a carved rosette. In a warehouse, once a family home, he came upon antique stinkwood cupboards. In a poor home he bought a four poster bed

and camphor-wood table at high prices. Someone in Loop Street sold him Chinese blue and white pottery of the seventeenth century, and a fine piece of Delft blue. Sometimes the poverty-stricken owners of antiques refused to sell. As a rule they took the money and watched tearfully while their heirlooms were carried away.

Cape silver looks so simple beside the work of the great silversmiths of Europe that in the past it was often discarded as junk. However, there were shrewd people (Cecil Rhodes among them) who saw the charm in simplicity. Cape silver also has a scarcity value. If you find spoons and forks in your attic bearing the initials G.L. (Gerhardus Lotter) or some other famous Cape

silversmith, take them to the nearest museum for identification. Only the other day a man who thought he had discovered old junk found that he was the owner of some Lawrence Twentymen silver made in Cape Town early last century.

Mr. John Faure, an auctioneer with an expert knowledge of Cape silver, was looking through the rubbish in a Wynberg garage recently when his eyes fell on a discoloured metal object on a stinkwood stand. Mr. W. A. van der Byl, owner of the goods to be sold, remarked that there was nothing of value in the garage. Faure picked up the metal object, turned it round and over and discovered the



craftsman's marks – D. H. S. and a bunch of grapes.

“This is the work of Daniel Heinrich Schmidt, and it will bring a couple of hundred guineas at least at the sale,” Faure promised.

It was a *tessie*, a silver fire-pan with copper lining. They used to fill the *tessie* with charcoal and hand it round among the smokers as they lit their pipes. Schmidt's work is regarded by collectors as the finest of all Cape silver. Rhodes had a Schmidt *tessie* at Groote Schuur. Here was another superb example, lying forgotten in a garage, its story lost for ever.

The auctioneer was right. That *tessie* was knocked down to the Burgerhuis Museum, Stellenbosch,

for three hundred and thirty-five guineas.

You can examine the rarest Cape silver collection in the South African Museum. It ranges from the Vos Cup (worth at least one thousand pounds) to spurs and snuffboxes. This is the David Heller collection. It includes the oldest-known example of Cape silver, a sweet dish made in the seventeen-twenties by Christian Ackermann.

I knew David Heller as an antique dealer and often went to him for guidance in such matters. He collected Cape silver when it was still the hobby of a very few people of foresight and culture. David Heller picked up many of his superb

pieces at low prices in unexpected places.

Some know the value of their antiques, others do not. There are old, unoccupied houses with furniture worth a fortune; but at times all this beauty grows dusty and is overlooked. I remember the astonishment of the antique experts when they visited the almost derelict Oranje Zigt homestead shortly after World War II, and discovered that it was filled with forgotten treasures.

Oranje Zigt, with its contents, had been bought by the City Council. The original homestead was built in 1709 by a Company's official named Loubzer; and it stood high above the town, so that Loubzer could see the Oranje bastion of the Castle. Hence

the name—"view of Oranje". Oranges do not grow well on the mountain, and there was no orange grove (as some have said) at Oranje Zigt. But oaks were planted in the early days. These huge trees and a cobbled front yard gave visitors an idea of age before they entered the lofty rooms.

Experts sent by the City Council gazed in wonder on the finest collection of antiques they had seen in Cape Town outside the museums. They saw one Georgian crystal chandelier worth hundreds of pounds; Delft and Wedgwood, Spode china and Chinese bowls; and there, too, was the famous De Smidt clock.

This clock, the only one of its kind in South Africa, possibly the only one

in the world, was bought in Cape Town by Abraham de Smidt (son of the first De Smidt) owner of Groote Schuur. Abraham de Smidt collected musical clocks, and this one had a music box and a number of puppets. At the stroke of each hour the music box played a dance tune, the Persian orchestra went into action and the dancing girl came to life.

A work of art was the De Smidt clock. It was sold after the death of Abraham de Smidt in 1868, and appears to have vanished until it came into the possession of Mr. F. O. Stevens, a great lover of antiques. Mr. Stevens bought Oranje Zigt and lived there for forty years, listening to this exquisite clock. When he died and the antiques were sold, the clock

went to the Africana Museum in Johannesburg. Price five hundred guineas.

Another even older clock at Oranje Zigt was a brass timepiece of the Cromwell period. A large Spanish mahogany table had come from Lady Anne Barnard's room at the Castle. There was a slave bell dated 1776, and bearing the VOC mark of the Dutch East India Company. A set of weights, used when the garden produce was sold, must have been two hundred years old. In the drawing-room stood an interesting cabinet from the Rex family home at Knysna, with G.R. (George Rex) and a broad arrow stamped on the back.

Famous antiques, like famous diamonds, may come into the public eye and then disappear for years before they can be admired by the crowd again. One of the old Dutch governors presented the De Smidt family (owners of so many wonderful antiques) with a fine goblet of the type known as *bokaal*. Cecil Rhodes made an offer for it. The family would not part with it, but they allowed it to be shown at Groote Schuur in a special cabinet.

After the death of Rhodes this valuable goblet disappeared. However, the De Smidt family had not forgotten this treasure, and after many inquiries it was traced to the home of Colonel Frank Rhodes in London. It had been taken there in error, with a shipment of antiques

which had belonged to Cecil Rhodes. The old goblet came back to Cape Town, and the De Smidts sold it to Sir Abe Bailey for one hundred and fifty pounds.

Plate and glass bearing the VOC monogram are now in great demand. Nevertheless, there was a gasp of surprise at a Cape Town sale not long ago when a large blue and white platter fetched two hundred and ten guineas. On the same day a rare VOC glass bearing the toast “Vivat Oranje” was sold for sixty-five guineas. Search your attics!

Sir Abe Bailey once bought a silk Persian carpet of superb design. Few people had seen it up to the time of the purchase. The previous

owner had kept it in a room which his friends were not allowed to enter unless they took off their shoes. This owner died, and his widow tried to sell the carpet for one thousand guineas. There were no offers, and Sir Abe Bailey secured it for five hundred pounds. Only then did the marvellous carpet become more widely known among connoisseurs.

Watchmakers have made romantic discoveries in the course of their work. I recall a watch brought to the newspaper office forty years ago by a Cape Town jeweller. It was an eighteen-carat gold English duplex watch made by Barwise of London in the year 1783. The jeweller, a true craftsman, had taken great pains in repairing the

watch, and he had also traced its story. Viscount Barrington had been the first owner, and his son had brought it to the Cape.

During the voyage young Barrington had fallen out with the captain over the treatment of a girl on board, and had challenged the captain to a duel. They fought on Green Point Common, with a member of the De Smidt family timing them with this watch. Barrington was severely wounded, but survived. And in 1922 the duplex watch was still keeping good time, losing fifteen seconds in ten days.

Watchmakers have told me that Cape Town has a large number of antique watches. Huge “turnips”

are running after a century or more. I believe there is a Cape farmer with a watch two and a half centuries of age, not only keeping the time but acting as an alarm, showing the phases of the moon and the date.

I have pointed out that some people do not know the value of their antiques, though I think the layman is more inclined to place a fantastic value on certain heirlooms. As an example of a priceless treasure which was not recognised for years I may quote the Huguenot Bible printed in French and kept in a Fresnaye house. Dr. D. P. de Villiers, chairman of the Huguenot Society, found the year 1693 in Roman numerals on the fly-leaf. The family tree had been torn out, but the

Bible had been handed down in one branch of the De Villiers family for nine generations.

In the Catholic Centre at Kolbe House, Rondebosch, a tattered parcel remained unopened and forgotten in a cupboard for twenty years. Someone examined it at last and found fourteen valuable lithographs of the Via Dolorosa series by Sir Frank Brangwyn. The artist had visited Cape Town in the eighteen-nineties and given them to his friend Monseigneur Kolbe.

Search your dusty cupboards. Think of frail Mr. F. Burfitt, eighty-six year-old widower, who was still at work running a little shop at Sea Point shortly before World War II. He had been married for sixty years,

and had lived in the same Sea Point house for forty years. One day he pulled a heavy tin box out of a cupboard. His wife had never told him that she had been saving for their old age, but here were her savings: more than eleven hundred golden sovereigns, notes and silver bringing the total value of the hoard up to about two thousand pounds. Mr. Burfitt, a railway pensioner, was able to give up work.

Just about the time of Mr. Burfitt's big surprise the owner of an wine chest made an accidental discovery. It was a handsome chest of polished Cape timber, with silver handles. The owner unconsciously touched a spring and a secret drawer flew open. He found an engraved plate with these words: "To the Perfect Hostess,

Lady Anne Barnard, The Castle, Cape Town, from Lord Mornington 1798". Lord Mornington stayed with the Barnards on the way to India, and Lady Anne described him as "the pleasantest companion and easiest guest".

Once in my life I stroked a genuine Stradivarius, handed to me in Cape Town by Yehudi Menuhin. I must have seen a dozen fakes, brought to the newspaper office by people who thought they had fortunes in their grasp. Factories on the Continent turn out violins by the thousand, each one bearing the label: "Antonius Stradivarius cremonensis faciebat 1721", and there is a tag somewhere marked "genuine imitation". Those tags come off easily, and so the cheap violins raise

high hopes all over the world. All the genuine Stradivarius violins have been traced and listed.

How many treasures, I wonder, have been found (but not reported) on the Cape Town municipal rubbish dumps? And how many must remain there, lost for ever!

Two pure white diamonds worth £850, mounted in rings and placed in cotton wool in a tiny white perfume soap box were thrown into the rubbish bin (accidentally, of course) by a Rondebosch woman not long ago. The owner, her insurance company and the police asked the authorities to comb the Mowbray dump for the diamonds. It seemed hopeless, a million to one chance. Yet after three days, when the men

were on the point of giving up, the little box was found. They had raked over twenty-four tons of refuse.

Apparently the cash value of rubbish is thoroughly understood nowadays. The city council invites tenders for the salvage and removal of waste from the main refuse disposal site at Windermere. You can make an offer for iron, wire, tins and other scrap metals. Bones fall into a class of their own, bottles into another, while branded milk bottles are in a separate class. Finally there is textile waste. And if you prefer beachcombing you may tender for the sole right to collect seaweed in various places.

Old cannon turn up in all sorts of places in Cape Town, and many have been used for unexplosive purposes.



For example, a grant of land made to the Dutch Reformed Church in Adderley Street in 1841 was marked by two iron ship's cannon. One of these beacons came to light in 1963 during the widening of Bureau Street.

Mr. C. W. Chester of Green Point spent years listing and photographing Cape Town's many cannon. Some were cemented into the wharves at Table Bay Docks for use as bollards. Many a home has ornamental cannon. Rusty cannon prevent modern motorists from driving down flights of steps. The old race track on Green Point Common was marked by cannon; and at the Kenilworth racecourse an upright cannon with a white line served as winning post.

Two rusty cannon with Dutch monograms lay for years in the grounds of the Sea Point town hall. They were the Signal Hill cannon which were fired when ships appeared on the horizon during the eighteenth century. Such pieces are treated nowadays with the respect they deserve, and the Historical Monuments Commission arranged for them to be mounted in gun carriages and restored to their old home in a stone emplacement just below the summit of Signal Hill.

Dutch troops set up a battery above Camp's Bay towards the end of last century. When General Craig occupied the Cape in 1795, he, too, placed cannon at the same spot (near where the Kloof Road joins the Victoria Road); and Lord Charles

Somerset ordered a small fort or block-house to be built on the battery site.

The fort was abandoned, but a toll-house just below it was occupied for many years. A family lived in the fort about one hundred years ago. Later it became a cattle kraal. Then it crumbled, and the guns were lost in the sand and bush.

Two small cannon were preserved in the garden of a Camp's Bay house. A bulldozer employed on road widening unearthed two large cannon. These historical guns are now being treated with the respect they deserve, and modern Camp's Bay has recovered its links with the days of Von Kamptz.

Cannon have been brought up from the Table Bay mud by dredgers and hauled out of the earth in city streets. Iron muzzle-loaders, eighteenth-century howitzers, guns bearing the *fleur de lis* of France, mortars and culverins, falcons and field guns; if these weapons were worth anything Cape Town would be able to round up a fortune within its boundaries. But you must find a nice brass cannon if you wish to bring antique dealers to your door.

Naturally a town once known as the "Tavern of the Seas" has a good many bottles down below the surface of land and water. You may recall the oak barrel containing clay pipes and dark-green hand-blown flagons of seventeenth-century design that were found by workmen digging the

foundations for an hotel in Strand Street. More recently a hand-blown glass bottle and pottery demijohn were found under the font of St. Frances Church at Simonstown. The church was built in 1831, but the relics were much older.

Cape Town's oldest bottle of beer was found in a brewery store-room not long ago. The bottle, of curious shape, bore the label "Swedish pale ale, brewed and bottled at the Mariedahl brewery". This was the Newlands brewery, of course, and the beer in that bottle was brewed in 1860. Still worth drinking? No one can say, for the cork and seal are intact and the bottle is being kept as a museum piece.

Somewhere in the Cape, I believe, there is an old-fashioned soda-water bottle which was brought up in 1822 from the wreck of the *Royal George* in Table Bay. I have seen an account of the sale of relics from that wreck. Someone, for sentimental or other reasons, paid twenty-five pounds for the soda-water bottle. Yes, there is an air of romance about relics and treasures large and small that return to us, almost miraculously, from the limbo of lost and forgotten things.



## Chapter Four

### SOUNDS, SONGS AND CRIES

*The man that hath not music  
in himself,  
Nor is not moved with  
concord of sweet sounds,  
Is fit for treasons,  
stratagems and spoils.*

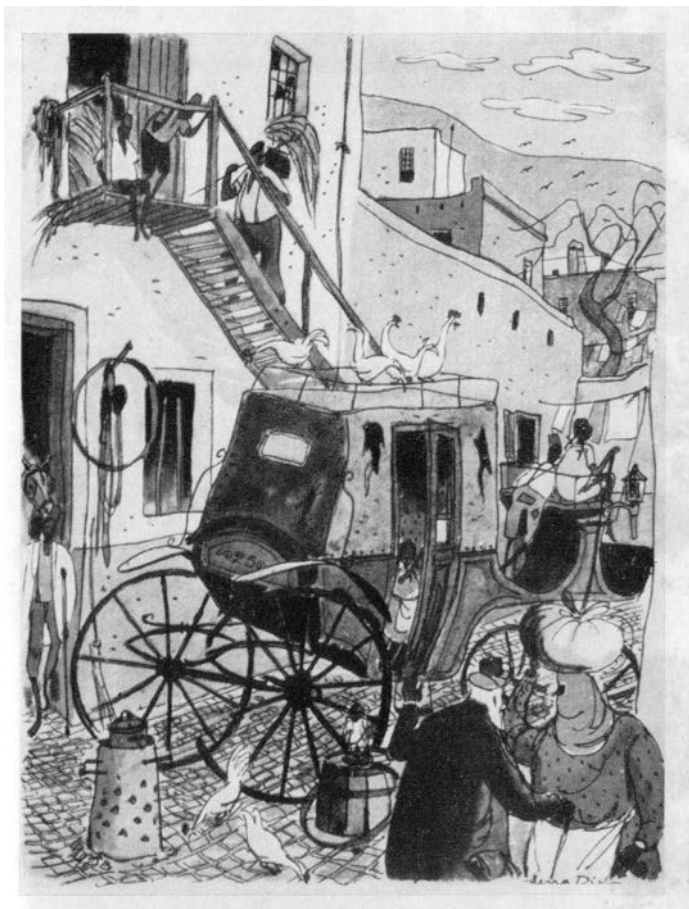
SHAKESPEARE

SOUNDS, like aromas, are keys to the past. Cape Town has not lost all its old street cries and calls, its folk music and songs. Only you do have to listen carefully if you wish

to hear the fish-horn in an age of screaming aircraft and tortured rubber tyres.

Where I live, Cape Town's most soothing and typical sound is the lullaby of the ocean on the Sea Point rocks. Though the great combers may crash on the beaches in winter gales and break over the road, there is no menace for me in those watery explosions, nothing to disturb my sleep.

*Screeuw! Screeuw!* In the morning, before the cars turn the day into a crazy maelstrom, there are the hungry gulls seeking bread on balconies instead of fishing in the sea that has fed seabirds for millions of years. Yet I prefer the



One old fashioned smithy that I remember was Hermann Doller's place in Waterkant street.

noisy begging of the gulls to the senseless racing of the cars. Cape Town's own sounds are surely to be found in the moods of the sea and the winds, especially the summer wind, the clean and boisterous south-easter. "Wheee! Whee! Wha-a-a!" There is nothing exactly like the song of the south-easter in the whole world.

After many, many years of research I believe that I have been given the true origin of the most famous of all the old Cape Town songs—"Vat jou goed en trek, Ferreira."

I tried to solve the mystery in a previous work years ago, and that brought me a letter from an old man who assured me that he had met the original Jan Ferreira in Cape Town in the 'seventies of last century.

"You could not forget him-the bandy legs were unmistakable," wrote my informant.

Jan Ferreira was a garrulous Portuguese who was always to be seen at the Parade auctions on Saturday mornings. One day Ferreira had some goods knocked down to him. He left the goods on the auctioneer's table, ignored all pleas and warnings, and went on talking to a friend. Finally the auctioneer lost his temper and shouted:"Vat jou goed en trek Ferreira ja, jy met die hoepel been."

Malays and other coloured humorists seized on this incident and found the undying tune that fitted the words. Ferreira, with his bandy legs, lives on in the folklore of Cape Town.

*Doo-doo, baba, doo-doo-doo,  
Maak jou mooie oogies toe,  
Engels kyk na jou van boë  
Doo-doo,baba, doo-doo-doo.*

The coons are marching again, and nowadays some of them are riding on horseback again. Cape Town gave birth to the coons last century, and (once again after years of research) I have found the details and solved the mystery of their origin. Some say that the coon troupes first appeared in the days of slavery, when the slaves were given a holiday on January 1 each year. No doubt there was revelry on those days of freedom, but that does not account for the black-faced troubadours in gleaming silk and satin.

Other minor historians have traced the coons back to the American “Jubilee Singers” of 1887, visitors who took Cape Town by storm and made a lasting impression. I know better. One of my wise old men told me that the pioneer coons had modelled their dress and performances on a band of Christy Minstrels who played in Cape Town during the eighteen sixties.

I was searching the *Cape Argus* files recently for something else when I came upon an account of the Christy Minstrels and their show in the Commercial Exchange in October 1868. So the coons will soon be enjoying their first centenary! The *Cape Argus* reported that the original Christy Minstrels were under the patronage

of the Governor (Sir Percy Douglas), and that while many people loved good music, five shillings was a lot to ask for a seat. Mr. Washington Norton, the manager, thereupon gave two popular concerts with a number of seats at one shilling each.

When you come to think of it, the typical coon outfit to this day is essentially a Christy Minstrel rig. I have seen many variations, from Spanish toreadors to Red Indian feathered headdresses. But the Christy Minstrel make-up, with blackened faces and white eyes, survives as proof, while the coons go singing and marching on. "*Aaits! Daar kom die coons.*"

The more sedate Malay choirs have their traditional songs, some of them a weird mixture of Nederland's and Afrikaans, and sometimes with lines which make no sense at all. A typical New Year song, heard when the choirs burst into the streets of Cape Town at midnight, is "Rosa", a love song:

*Sy seg sy sal my nooit verlaat  
Sy volg my waar ek gaan  
Rosa Rosa diet een hart  
En sy volg my waar ek gaan.*

John Campbell, a Cape Town magistrate during the early years of the century, was greatly feared by the town drunkards because of his heavy sentences. Some wit composed a song, to the tune of "Just before the battle, mother," which



became extremely popular in District Six and the harbour area:

*Just before de barrel, murrer  
I was drinking tickey beer,  
But I took too much, dear  
murrer,  
So to home I could not steer,  
Den de bobby took me, murrer.  
And my money disappear,  
Now I cannot pay John  
Campbell,  
And my kop is baing seer.*

A popular figure along the Cape Town waterfront at the turn of the century (so the old men assure me) was Mr. A. R. McKenzie<sup>2</sup> the

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<sup>2</sup> McKenzie's boss stevedore, Timothy Robertson, was still living in Cape Town recently at the age of ninety-three. Robertson, a native of

cartage contractor." His wagon-drivers, coolies and stable-boys were a musical crowd. They sang as they worked, picking up sea shantys at the docks as they loaded the wagons. (The railway had not been extended to the harbour area). In the canteens on pay days they had a special song in honour of their employer, a strange effort which no one has been able to translate:

*Markenzie is een man  
Hy betaal uit sy hand  
Sackeeyo, sackeeyo!  
Moet sy hickie, moet sy crickie*

---

British Guiana, came to the Cape as cook in a sailing ship. He settled in Parow when the village had only one shop.

*Moet sy groot toon sy  
Sy my sy kandelaar  
See sackeeyo!*

“*Het ou Pellie!*” I suppose that is the most typical of the popular greetings that belong essentially to Cape Town; but the origin would be hard to trace. One expert thinks it falls into the Malay-Portuguese group.

Greetings in the pure Malay tongue are not so common as they used to be. Only a handful of Cape Malays now speak the language of their ancestors.

“*Salam alaikoem*” is often heard. “Peace be with you.”

“*W’alaikoem salam*” is the correct response. “And with you be peace also.”

When a Malay is going away you may hear his friends saying: “*Slamat jalan,*” meaning “a good journey to you.”

“*Slamat tinggal,*” calls the traveller. “May you rest content.”

“*Aaar-geee!*” That has been Cape Town’s most famous street cry for more than a century. Of course there are many variations, though the old Cape Argus has never changed its name.

“*Oy ai!*” It is still the same newspaper, but the “city late” is out and the newsboys are determined to let you know it. “*Oy ai!*”

“*Straspeshul-argeee!*” You do not often hear that cry, for it is only justified when great dramas are

being played. Not every year is there an extra-special edition.

*“Aaar-geee!”* Few people realise that the coloured boys and venerable Malays selling the newspapers have developed a news sense. A glance at the posters and they know what their takings will be.

One of the shrewdest of these newspaper magnates of the streets was Marcus van der Berg Hendricks. You must remember him, for his pitch was usually in Adderley Street, he wore a brown overcoat and smoked a cheroot. He cried *“Aaar-geee!”* for the first time in 1900 (when he was nine); and seven hundred people attended his funeral in 1958. Circulation

managers often consulted this man who had sold fifty million newspapers. He knew what people like to read.

Women also sell newspapers. I remember Togera Toffar, a veiled Malay, who saved enough from the sale of newspapers to make the Mecca pilgrimage. (That cost four hundred pounds in 1950, when Togera went). For years she had sat at the foot of the Avenue, sheltering her papers with an umbrella in winter, holding them down with stones in south-easters, saving the pennies that would take her to Durban and then Bombay, and Jeddah and finally sacred Mecca:

*“Wartee melon! Sweet wartee-melon!”* Far older than the shouts of the newsboys are the cries of the hawkers. Watermelons have flourished at the Cape since Van Riebeeck’s day. These melons, described by an old writer as “frozen snow coloured red,” have been sold in the streets for centuries. The days when a slice of ripe watermelon could be bought at the rate of a halfpenny a pound have departed. Watermelons are not in season for long. But while they are here the old tests are applied; watermelons are placed on many a knowing head; the ends are drawn down; the ripe ones give a satisfying crunch. *“Wartee melon! Wartee melon!”*

Sometimes the hawker breaks into a song which has more than one version:

*W-a-a-t-lamoen, lekka, lekka in  
die blom,  
So rooi soos bloed so  
suikersoet.  
Wa-a a-a-t-lamoen.*

Cape Town had about four thousand hawkers and barrow-boys, but their numbers have dwindled recently. They take more than half the market produce and sell cheap fruit in the city. Often they are ordered to move on, and there are some who would like to see them driven off the streets. The farmers would not. They know how much they owe to the efforts, the humour and the songs of the hawkers.

*Druuwe! Lekker druuwe,  
Soete druuwe, Hanepote,  
Soete druuwe,  
Wonderful grapes!*

Those who did not specialise in grapes had a cry which covered other wares:

*Koop!... Oulap se appels  
Oulap se peere,  
Oulap se uiwe  
En een trossie druuwe.*

*“Besems! Besems!”* That is a cry which I have not heard for years. Brooms come from factories nowadays. Coloured people still make the old-fashioned stoep and garden brooms of vlei reeds, but the itinerant broom-seller has almost disappeared, and the cry comes faintly. *“Besems! Besems!”*

*“Stra-a-awberiss! Stra-a-awberiss!”*  
This hawker carries a round cane basket filled with smaller baskets; and there are often more oak leaves than strawberries. Yet that blend of aromas, the luscious red fruit and the fresh green leaves, is a nostalgic experience. I wish that I could recall the whole scene when first I handled a strawberry basket.

*“Lekker vars boontjies! Patat! Lemoene! Alles vars!”* Vegetable and fruit hawkers certainly have a way of making their wares sound appetising. Some of them are rhymesters in a simple way, though such forms of wit are not so widespread as they used to be. *“Lekker lemoene sonder skoene! Ons nartjies dra geel baadjies!”*

*“Tammeletjies! Tammeletjies!”* One famous seller of the celebrated Cape toffee stood for many years last century under an oak in the Avenue. One penny bought a satisfying sweet. Later they became: *“Twalep een”*.

*“Samoosas, lekker warmes!”* And here is the spiced mince-meat in fried pastry, just the thing for a picnic or a rugby match.

*“Fish, fish, fish all alive!”* This was the cry of many Malay fish-sellers with pagoda hats during the ‘eighties of last century. They carried fish baskets slung on rods over their shoulders, and the fish were indeed alive; at all events during the early part of the man’s rounds from Rogge Bay.

*“Peanuts!”* You hear that hoarse shout far more often nowadays than the picturesque cries. If you can escape, you are lucky. *“Peanuts!”*

*“Ricksha! Ricksha!”* Yes, the cry of the Zulu ricksha man was heard in Cape Town at the turn of the century. There were only about a dozen of them, brought from Durban by Messrs. Wessels and Visser. Few people used the rickshas, and the Zulus were sent back to Natal. *“Jingle-clang! Jingle-clang!”* Cape Town still has about half a dozen hansom-cabs, but their warning bells are seldom heard nowadays. You may see them at Kenilworth on race days. Most of these survivors turn out for the annual horse and cart parade at Maitland.

Yes, there is something to be said for the melodious warning of the hansom-cab, with the smiling Malay face of the driver framed under a rich, tight bandanna with straw hat above it. Far more pleasing than a scowling, hooting motorist. "*Jingle-clang!*"

Hawkers are among the last horse-owners in the peninsula, fish hawkers, fruit and vegetable hawkers. They decorate their harness with the traditional British horsebrasses, the chains known as *hangbelletjies*, rein-rings and rosettes. So here is more of the music of the streets, clinking softly as the carts go by.

Fires still roar, and sledgehammers beat on anvils, in Cape Town's last blacksmith shops. Even thirty years ago there was work for scores of them.

Now the racehorses keep the trade alive. But the fires are going out, and there are few apprentices learning the craft of the farrier.

One old-fashioned smithy that I remember was Hermann Doller's place in Waterkant Street. Doller swung his sledgehammer there for over forty years. When the police used "bullseyes" before the days of electric torches, 'Doller mended these lanterns. He was also an artist in copper, and his kettles and pots still shine in many kitchens.

Herman Lane off Harrington Street was another corner which was filled with the sound of hooves on the cobbles, swishing manes and the clang of metal. This was Poggenpoel's smithy, where Oupa

Poggenpoel worked with his four sons. Every sort of horse could be found in that lane. Wagons, traps and carts were built there in the heart of Cape Town. Slowly the flourishing business came to an end, and the proud sign disappeared at last: "J. A. Poggenpoel, veterinary blacksmith, farrier and wagon builder:"

*"Prah, prah, prah!"* It is the fish horn, now become such a rarity that no one regards it as a breach of the peace. Yet there was a time when Cape Town people almost went mad with rage when they heard the fish horn.

W. Clark Russell, that fine old seafaring author of Victorian times, was in Cape Town about seventy

years ago. He found the town far too noisy for his liking. At dawn he awoke to a curious kind of groaning noise that sounded like a mourning chorus of fanatics. Later he discovered that hundreds, or perhaps thousands of cocks were crowing all at once.

Russell described the fish horn as "another special feature of Cape Town." All day the air was resonant with these detestable notes. "This sort of noise the people endure apparently for no other reason than that their servants may know that some very tough and tasteless fish are coming their way in a black man's cart," he concluded. Evidently a prejudiced observer.



Nevertheless, public feeling came to a head in 1904, when many leading citizens signed a petition to the mayor, asking him to prohibit “the appalling and terrible noise caused by the use of that barbaric instrument, the fish horn.”

The protest reached the Supreme Court, where a hawker appealed against his conviction for “disturbing the peace” with a fish horn. Lord de Villiers, chief justice, upheld the appeal. “Although the noise of the fish horn is not very musical and might affect the nerves of extremely sensitive people,” said the chief justice, “laws are made for ordinary human beings and cannot be adapted to the peculiar temperament of each individual. The fish carts cannot drive to every

house, so the drivers must blow their horns. Unless the horns are blown in such a way as to endanger the public health, it is impossible to say that a nuisance has been created.”

Cape Town’s earliest fish-horns were hollow lengths of kelp. More durable horns were made later from paraffin tin, and for many years these were sold at a shilling apiece. Handsome copper fish-horns are now on the market at seven times the old price.

So the fish horn has come down triumphantly to our own day, as loud as ever and perfectly legal. *“Prah, prah, prah!”*

*“Boo-oo-oom!”* That is Cape Town’s loudest and most famous

man-made sound. The noon gun explosion takes five seconds to reach the centre of the city, and some people in the suburbs have to wait eighteen seconds after the flash. Nevertheless, you can rely on “gun time” for setting your watch except on those winter days when the gunpowder is damp and there is no noon boom. Or a rare electrical defect may rob us of the familiar sound.

Dutch governors used to fire their cannon on special occasions, but Cape Town’s time signal did not become a custom until early last century. First there were gun signals fired from the Imhoff battery in front of the Castle every morning and evening. Then an assistant on the roof of the newly-

built Royal Observatory fired a brass percussion pistol, loaded with black powder, every night. Shipmasters in Table Bay trained their telescopes on the observatory and corrected their chronometers. By the middle of last century the more accurate time-ball system had been established for the benefit of navigators; and there was also a gun signal from the Castle for townsfolk. For many years the Castle gun went off regularly at one-thirty in the afternoon. One failure was due to the gunner being found drunk on duty.

The noon gun is a fairly modern arrangement, though it had come into force in 1903, when Signal Hill became the home of the cannon firing this daily blast.

Seamen love to tell a story of the early Signal Hill days. One master mariner, it was said, climbed the hill to Lion Battery and found an old naval rating in charge of the gun.

“Where do you get your time from?” inquired the captain.

“Look through my telescope, and you’ll see a clock outside a jeweller’s shop in Adderley Street,” replied the gunner. “That clock is always dead right.”

Next day the captain walked into the jeweller’s shop and asked the jeweller how he was able to check his wonderful clock.

“Easy,” replied the jeweller. “I set it by the noon gun.” To return to reality, I can tell you that the noon

gun is a muzzle-loader more than two hundred years old. The municipality agreed some time ago to pay the South African Navy seven shillings and nine pence a day for this service; seven and three for the gunpowder in its silk bag, and sixpence for the gunner. As you know, the gun is fired by an electrical impulse from the Royal Observatory. Years ago the Worcester municipality arranged for Cape Town’s noon gun to be relayed by telephone. A ringer stood by in the town square and struck the old slave bell when the signal was received. The bell still rings at noon in Worcester, but the radio time signal has replaced the gun.

By the way, Cape Town is not the only city in the world which has “gun time”. Hong Kong has a similar time signal, operated by a private shipping company. Noel Coward brought the Hong Kong gun into his song “Mad Dogs and Englishmen”. Perhaps some future South African composer will embody Cape Town’s noon gun in a musical masterpiece. “*Boo-oo-oom!*”

Cape Town has the finest carillon in the southern hemisphere, though it is seldom that the City Hall bells are heard nowadays. The carillonneur is a rare bird among musicians. And the physical effort is so great that only a strong man can hammer the great wooden keyboard.

Those bells in the City Hall tower weigh ten tons. The carillonneur must use foot pedals for the large bells. Hands and feet are kept hard at it, and the carillonneur wears shirt and shorts for this back-breaking task.

Cape Town’s carillon of thirty-two bells was installed about six years after World War I. Each bell carries the name of a South African brigade, regiment or group of men who took part in that war. One bell has the name of municipal employees who died.

Anton Brees, the Belgian carillonneur, came to Cape Town in 1925 to ring the bells in honour of the visit of the Prince of Wales. While this famous carillonneur was here he taught Jan

Luyt; and Jan was appointed city carillonneur a few years later.

The youthful Jan Luyt played carols every Christmas Day, and other music on other special occasions. When the King and Queen and princesses drove through Cape Town he gave them "Royal Fantasia".

Bell music once acted as a gentle metronome to the pulse of daily life. Now, even in Belgium, the carillon has been almost shouldered out of public favour. There are in the whole world only a few dozen skilled carillonneurs. So the City Hall belfry gives you the time but rarely indeed do you hear the full music of the bells.

Organ music has been played in Cape Town ever since the time of

Governor Jan de la Fontaine, whose daughter was an organist.

The governor found a craftsman in the company's service who was able to build an organ. Governor de la Fontaine sold this organ to the church council for five hundred guilders when he departed. It served the church for fifteen years. Then another organ was built locally, but it gave constant trouble.

Early last century the council ordered a new organ through the firm of E. K. Green, and this was supplied by organ builders in England. Here I should explain that the E. K. Greens were not always wine merchants. Edward Knolles Green, first of the family to settle at the Cape, was the son of a London

publisher. He became a professional musician, and travelled to Cape Town in 1814 to install an organ in the Lutheran Church, Strand Street.

E. K. Green stayed on, married Antoinette Berning, and opened a music shop in Long Street. There he sold pianos, bonnets and perfumery. Later he moved to Bree Street and started an academy of music. His son set up as a wine merchant in Malmesbury, moving to Cape Town some years afterwards. The first E. K. Green died before the imported organ had been installed in the Dutch Reformed Church, Adderley Street; but his widow carried on the business.

That organ from England had to be rebuilt in 1923, but it was not finally dismantled until 1957. During more than two centuries it was the third organ to be used in the church.

Now the Groote Kerk has the largest church organ in Africa, probably in the southern hemisphere. An expert in acoustics came from Europe a few years ago to study the peculiarities of the huge church. The thousands of pipes are mainly of tin, specially strengthened for the hot weather. Tin is the metal which musicians prefer; an organ, a “kist o’ whistles” as the Scots say, is really a box of tin whistles.

Organs mature with age, like wine and violins. Nevertheless, the great organ already gives an idea of the power it will wield a century hence.

## **Chapter Five**

### **TOWER AND BELLS**

*What is a church?— Our  
honest sexton tells,  
'Tis a tall building, with a  
tower and bells*

GEORGE CRABBE

CHURCHES usually remain longer in our midst than other buildings. Exiles returning to Cape Town after many years will not feel at home in the modern street canyons until they find the churches of their youth unchanged.

So my 1904 guidebook is still fairly accurate in its description of the Cape Peninsula churches. Only a few have vanished. I shall not quote the guide, however, for such works are more concerned with

architecture than the strong human interest which surrounds church walls.

Start with the oldest of them all. This is, of course, the Groote Kerk in Adderley Street, the mother church of the Afrikaners, standing on ground consecrated more than two and a half centuries ago. The church tower which formed part of the original building still survives with its bells; one cast in Amsterdam in 1726, and an English bell of 1800. This was the only Protestant church in the African continent when it was built early in the eighteenth century.

Plaster crashed to the floor during a service in 1835 and reminded the congregation that a new church



would have to be built. Plans were drawn up by the great architect Herman Schutte. It is strange to reflect that the large building, with its vaulted roof, cost only seventeen thousand pounds. Seven years after the plaster incident the new church was opened. When the bells ceased ringing the crowd outside was larger than the congregation of three thousand people who filled the church. That morning the collection reached four hundred pounds.

Some years ago the roof span of the Groote Kerk was said to be the third largest of its kind in the world. Many visitors find such a roof awe-inspiring, for it is not supported by pillars. Schutte designed the ceiling so cleverly that

a preacher is able to reach his congregation without shouting.

This church has South Africa's oldest public clock. Once the church tower was regarded as a skyscraper; now the clock is almost hidden by the surrounding buildings.

Church records show that the original clock started behaving in an eccentric manner at the end of the eighteenth century. Various "experts" monkeyed with the works for years without success. One man, indeed, was reprimanded by the Kerkraad for allowing the clock to act crazily. Years passed, and then in 1829 the clock which had been installed in Tulbagh's day was advertised in the Cape "Gazette":

“To be sold without reserve as it stands in the tower of the Reformed Church in the Heerengracht: The Clock with the four dials, the four sets of hands, motion work, angular rodding, lines and weights. Having undergone a thorough repair, a desirable opportunity now offers of supplying any of the country churches on advantageous terms, as it will positively be sold to the highest bidder.”

Clock historians, including Sir George Cory, tried in vain to trace the buyer. Possibly there was no buyer. The historic clock vanished mysteriously. Mr. Twentymen, the jeweller, then installed a new

mechanism sent to Cape Town by a London firm.

Among the church personalities of Cape Town last century was the Rev. G. W. Stegmann, an emotional preacher and great worker for the coloured people. He was minister of the Lutheran Church in Strand Street, and at the same period he evangelized the ex-slaves at St. Stephen's, the Dutch Reformed Church and former theatre in Riebeeck Square. Apparently no one saw anything unusual in one minister serving congregations of different religions.

Mr. Stegmann also preached at the Groote Kerk in Adderley Street. One evening his eloquence had unexpected results, for a half-witted

member of the congregation stood up and shouted: “You have said enough about hell-now tell us about heaven!”

Disturbances are so rare during church services that they are long remembered. One dramatic interruption at the Groote Kerk came at a time when the floor was in need of repair. A bulky lady, moving uneasily in her pew, felt the boards giving way under her. She disappeared into the grave of an early Cape governor.

This great church has been described as the “Westminster Abbey of South Africa”. Not only governors but ministers, senior officials of the Dutch East India Company and heads of old Cape families were

buried beneath the Batavian flagstones of the church. Keen observers have noticed that the flagstones (composed of saltstone) change colour according to the weather; they are light in summer, becoming dark in times of storm.

Among the thousand bodies laid to rest in this Dutch Reformed Church were six Cape governors and some British officials. Governor William Wake of Bombay, who died on a voyage to the Cape, was buried here more than two hundred years ago. French officers were also buried in the crypts and vaults, and it was not until 1835 that the last burial was carried out within the church itself.

English chaplains from passing men-o'-war often conducted services in

the Groote Kerk. British soldiers marched there with their bands, and over a long period the Dutch service was followed by the English. Only when the first St. George's Cathedral was built was the custom discontinued. The Groote Kerk was, in fact, the first South African church in which English services were held.

One of the older members of the Groote Kerk congregation talked to me of the days when coloured people shared the church with the white Capetonians. "Slaves were taught the catechism from the very early days," he recalled. "Small gifts, such as snuff or a sopie of wine, were the rewards for learning a lesson well. Coloured people were admitted to all services. I attended the same classes and was confirmed

with a few coloured boys and girls. When the mission churches were started, some of the older coloured members could not be persuaded to join. I recall one venerable coloured man begging the Kerkraad for permission to remain as a member of the white congregation. He reasoned that he had been christened, confirmed and married in that church, and all his children had become members. He was allowed to stay. When he died it was found that he had left all his money, several hundred pounds, to the church he had loved."

Many old Capetonians were sorry to see the Nieuwe Kerk in Bree Street being demolished a few years ago, for this was another

spacious building with a story, another of Herman Schutte's masterpieces. It occupied a whole block with its blue gums and it was really a miniature Groote Kerk.

It seems that the Nieuwe Kerk arose during the eighteen thirties because of some forgotten controversy in the Groote Kerk congregation. Certain members broke away and set up the new church in what was then the fashionable residential quarter of upper Bree Street.

Yellow bricks, carried from Holland as ballast in sailing ships, formed part of the thick outside walls. Shell lime took the place of cement. Red deal roof beams with

wrought-iron stirrups lasted until the church was pulled down.

Twelve thousand people gathered in the little Cape Town of 1833 to watch Governor Sir Lowry Cole laying the cornerstones. Signal Hill battery fired a salute of twenty-one guns, and ships in Table Bay replied with their cannon. The last services were held there in 1957, and then the church became a garage. Fine chandeliers still hung from the plaster ceiling.

Another offshoot of the Groote Kerk was the Rogge Bay church for fishermen. Once this was a small building on the shores of Rogge Bay, and the congregation moved to a proper church building in Somerset Road early this century. It

was still known as the Rogge Bay church, and when the members dwindled to twenty, the building was turned into a school.

Yet another outpost was the Three Anchor Bay church where for seven decades, services were held in Dutch (and later Afrikaans) and English. This church had only nine ministers in eight-two years. Schools for boys and girls were started in the side rooms, and these developed into the Sea Point Boys' High School and the Ellerslie Girls' School.

Wynberg has a Dutch Reformed Church with an arched roof supported by four granite pillars. Rhodes presented the pillars. A little side building with bell-arch is

all that remains of the original church built one hundred and thirty years ago.

South Africa's oldest mission church, the Sendinggestig in Long Street, Cape Town, was recently declared an historical monument. It was built in 1802 by the first missionary society in the Cape. The interior, with its unusual roof and imported benches, has a remarkable beauty.

Kalk Bay lost its interesting little Dutch Reformed Church in 1950, when the building was sold. The first congregation attended services in a stable at St. James; but the church was built in the middle of last century. Mr. Abraham Auret, a great figure in the False Bay

whaling and fishing industry, and owner of part of Muizenberg, was the builder.

According to legend the builders finished the roof and held a celebration without Aurret's permission. That night a gale arose and blew the roof on to the beach. This was regarded as a punishment.

No money was available for a new roof. Members of the Church of England then came forward and offered to finish the church provided they were allowed to hold their own services there. Agreement was reached, and the church was shared for many years.

The Rev. Andrew Murray, that great preacher and Wellington personality, had a seaside cottage at

Kalk Bay. As a young man he conducted many services in the Kalk Bay church.

Anglicans, as I have said, made use of the Groote Kerk during the eighteenth century and afterwards. The first English service was held in April 1749, when Admiral Boscawen called with twenty-six men-o'-war on his way to capture Madras.

Nearly half a century passed and the Rev. J. E. Attwood, a naval chaplain, became the first regular Anglican clergyman in South Africa. It was in 1795, just after the first British occupation of the Cape, that Mr. Attwood made an unfortunate blunder.

Mr. Attwood was asked to marry a British officer to a young lady he had met on the way to India. The clergyman, happy to assist in this shipboard romance, overlooked the fact that the couple should have first secured the approval of the Matrimonial Court in Cape Town. When this court heard of the marriage they proclaimed it unlawful.

The officer petitioned General Craig to rescue him from this embarrassing position, but the general refused. Only when the officer applied for a marriage licence was he allowed to go through a second and legal ceremony.

The first improvised Anglican church at the Cape was a sail-loft built by the Dutch East India Company at Simonstown. Services were held there as far back as 1801. The sail-loft is part of a stone “mast-house”, an important place in the days of masts, yards, rigging and canvas. Sailmakers worked there during the week, and the altar was uncovered on Sundays. Finally, in 1935, a permanent church was set up in one half of the loft while the sail makers continued to occupy the other half.

Two oak chairs which stood in the church for many years were made from the timber of H.M.S. *Badger*, commanded by Lieut. Horatio Nelson long before Trafalgar. (In fact, she was Nelson’s first



command). The *Badger* was broken up in Simon's Bay a century ago. One of the huge stinkwood beams supporting the mast-house provided the door (of Norman design) for the dockyard church.

St. Frances Church, Simonstown, is the oldest Anglican church (designed as a church) in South Africa. It was built on the site of the Dutch Company's granaries in 1837. Some writers give the date as 1814, when the church was planned, but it was not built at that time.

Many tablets have been placed on the walls in memory of naval men who lost their lives in Cape waters. Beside the members of old English families you may read such strange

West African names as Tom Cockroach and Bottle of Beer.

Travel up the line from Simonstown and you find a thatched Anglican church with a Gothic porch at Kalk Bay, the Holy Trinity Church among the cypress trees. You may remember that Bishop Gray brought a number of English settlers to Cape Town about a century ago. Two of these settlers found all the money for Holy Trinity. They were the Misses Harriet and Charlotte Humphreys, and the church is a replica of one which they had attended in Bristol.

Glance at the font if you visit this church. Decorated in elaborate Victorian style, it was presented by Mr. George Nicholls in memory of

his daughters Emma and Madeline. These two young girls were drowned at Kalk Bay nearly ninety years ago. Since then, a trust fund created by Mr. Nicholls has paid out more than fifty thousand pounds to “persons of genteel birth in reduced circumstances,” poor clergymen, sick members of poor families needing seaside holidays, and other deserving people.

Mr. Nicholls went down to the beach with his three daughters on the morning of tragedy. All three wore the heavy serge bathing costumes of the period. All three were caught in the backwash and carried out to sea. One was saved.

Bishop Gray once laid the foundation stone of a church

designed by his wife. This was St. Andrew's in Newlands Avenue. Just over a century ago the Table Mountain rock was taken to the site by wagon, and in 1858 the church was opened. St. Andrew's was sold to an artist a few years ago. Though it was no longer in use as a church, the solid building showed few signs of age.

St. Paul's, the brown stone church on the rise above Rondebosch fountain, is a quarter of a century older than St. Andrew's. It still has a fragment of the forest that gave Rondebosch its name. Here again is a reminder of the drowning of Emma and Madeline Nicholls, a fine east window given by the heart-broken father.

Rondebosch was a farming community when St. Paul's was opened, and flourishing homesteads were to be found on the Liesbeek river banks. Groote Schuur was not the residence of today, but was simply a gabled, thatched farmhouse on the De Strydom estate.

I wish that I could take you to old St. Luke's at Salt River, built in the eighteen-sixties on the site of the place of execution for slaves. When the first Cape railway was built, many of the English artisans attended this church. They are credited with introducing the singing of Christmas carols to Cape Town.

This active congregation started choral, dramatic, debating and

musical societies, and members of the church founded the once-famous technical college not far away. Here, too, that famous volunteer regiment, the Duke's, was formed, with the railway superintendent, Colonel Roberts, in command. A church parade was held once a month.

Table Bay was close to the church in those days, and on Sunday evenings the churchgoers carried lanterns so that they could reach their homes without falling into pools.

Sir David Gill the astronomer and members of his staff were church officers in those early days.

There came a time when new railway tracks were laid so close to

the church that it was impossible to hold services. So the railways bought the old church towards the end of last century and a new church was built. Not until early in World War II, however, was old St. Luke's demolished.

Right up to the end there were elderly coloured people (and others) at Salt River who avoided passing St. Luke's in the darkness. They remembered the stories they had heard of the graveyard and the gallows.

*Funera plango, fulgura frango,  
Sabbata pango,  
Excito lentos, dissipo ventos,  
paco cruentos.*

Church bells, music of the angels, are among Cape Town's more

dignified sounds. When I hear the bells of St. Mary's I always think of that Latin inscription on an ancient bell:

*I mourn for death, I break the  
lightning, I fix the Sabbath,  
I rouse the lazy, I scatter the  
winds, I appease the cruel.*

Years ago the bells of St. Mary's, Woodstock, rang across the water as I sailed on Table Bay. The satisfying rhythm aroused my admiration and my curiosity, for no other Cape Town church had a set of bells on which a "full peal" could be performed. One day I climbed into the tower with the rector and met the bell-ringers.

A "peal of bells", by the way, is a term that is often used incorrectly.

It does not mean a set of church bells (that is a “ring”), nor must it be used in describing a short performance on the bells. A full peal of bells is a rare event; it involves ringing all the possible changes, and when there are eight bells, about five thousand changes represent the minimum.

Bell-ringers talk in wonder of peals involving sixteen thousand changes, rung by the English giants of the past.

Such a feat occupies nine hours or more and leaves the ringers with all stamina gone. It ranks, indeed, with a severe athletic test of endurance. The strain is felt not only by the heroes in the tower, but by all

within close range of the tremendous harmony.

Tablets in the tower of St. Mary’s commemorate the achievements of bygone Woodstock bell-ringers. “First science ringing in South Africa,” states one tablet dated December 22, 1903, the year the bells were installed. On this occasion was heard “Bob Minor”, comprising seven hundred and twenty changes in twenty-five minutes.

The following year a more ambitious programme was carried out – a peal of “Grandsire Trebles” involving five thousand and forty changes and lasting three hours seven minutes. No doubt there are still old residents of Woodstock

who remember the day. It was the first peal rung anywhere in Africa. Since then the bells have been recorded for broadcasting. They were included in one of Queen Elizabeth's Christmas broadcasts from Sandringham.

One mistake in the majestic sequence of a "peal" is fatal. A table of figures, chalked on a blackboard, replaces the printed sheet of music used by other players. And no one whose brain is staggered by columns of figures should attempt to become a bell ringer.

One of the St. Mary's bells is heard every day. This is the treble, tolled by the rector himself before the early service and evensong. These

bells have been heard on quiet nights as far away as the foot of Adderley Street and, borne by the south-easter, at the docks. A bell-ringer lying in Woodstock Hospital after an operation found that he could distinguish the clear tone of each bell. That was just the right distance to appreciate the music. In the belfry there is no enjoyment, only a din mellowing with distance. Bats do lurk in belfries, by the way, and a pair of pigeons nested in the St. Mary's tower. They always left when the bells rang.

There have been bells in Cape Town almost ever since the day the first white settlers arrived. The alarm bell, taken from a ship, was probably the first. A bell sounded from the Castle when the court was

held. In 1663 Commander van Wagenaar asked the Dutch East India Company to supply two bells “to enliven the farmers in this lonely place”. The Castle bell marked the hours in shipboard fashion, broke the great silence of the Table Valley for church services, and warned the settlers when crimes were committed or raids were threatened.

Bells in the Old Town House in Greenmarket Square sounded the fire alarm during the eighteenth century. When the Metropolitan Church was built in 1879 the mayor, Mr. Charles Lewis, had the bells removed from the Town House and installed in the church tower. They were rung in 1887, in honour of Queen Victoria’s jubilee.

Those bells had a beautiful tone, but the tower showed signs of strain and the “rhyming and the chiming of the bells” were never heard again.

Some of you will recall the horse-drawn fire-engines that stood in the Burg Street fire station. I always remember the harness that hung poised in mid-air, ready to drop on to the horses’ backs. When the bells were moved to the church an ingenious mechanic named Bowley arranged an underground device which enabled the bells in the tower to be rung from the Old Town House not only as church bells but as a fire alarm. No doubt the rusty pipe and wire still runs under the street. It fell into disuse for the reason I have given; there

was said to be a risk of the peal bringing the tower down.

St Mark's in District Six must rank as the church of the toughest parish in the diocese. The rectory was once a shebeen. Even the church has been robbed, and the clergymen who have laboured there have had to rely on their "dog-collars" for safety. It is a rule in all decent criminal circles that doctors, nurses and ministers of religion must be allowed to pass freely. Honour among thieves!

However, this is one of the largest Anglican churches in the peninsula, and a Sunday congregation of one thousand people is not unusual. In recent years there was a rector of St. Mark's, a former Eton master,

who had a public-school accent. He complained that some of his young parishioners had succeeded in imitating it.

This rector used to carve with an extremely sharp knife which came into his possession after a struggle with a skolly. Fortunately the rector was an athlete. He was in the habit of stopping any gambling which he encountered in District Six, and seizing the money for charity. You have to be above average as a street fighter to carry out a campaign like that successfully.

I am among those who regret the passing of the old St. George's Cathedral, mother church of the diocese. St. George's Street lost some of its character for me when



the tower and pillared portico of the cathedral disappeared at one end and the view of the shipping at the other was shut out.

The old brick and stucco cathedral was modelled on St. Pancras Church in London. It was built in the eighteen-thirties, when Cape Town had no bishop of its own, but formed part of the diocese of distant Calcutta.

Naval surveyors who chart the world are fond of church towers, because such landmarks are more permanent than many others. Years ago the tower on St. Mary's Cathedral appeared on the Table Bay charts, and mariners took bearings with the aid of the cross. It was the highest tower in Cape

Town a century ago, and very useful for fixing a ship's position.

The tower has gone, but St. Mary's in Roeland Street is still the mother church of Roman Catholics in the Cape. It contains a painting of the Crucifixion which was given by the Emperor Napoleon III. Van Dyk has been suggested as the painter, for the style is reminiscent of this master and the painting is of a very high order. However, this is sheer guesswork.

Methodist soldiers who marched into Cape Town with General Baird early last century worshipped in a Plein Street hayloft. They had to pass the horses and climb a ladder. Within a few months, however, they had raised enough money to buy a

wine-cellar in an alley off Barrack Street. This became the first Wesleyan Church, with services for soldiers, civilians and slaves, in English and Dutch.

At first there was a lay preacher, the indomitable Sergeant John Kendrick of the Dragoons. His was no easy task, for the Wesleyans were persecuted and a colonel ordered an early chapel at Wynberg to be burnt. The soldiers then built another little chapel in the forest, on land owned by a sympathiser.

When the first Wesleyan minister arrived, Lord Charles Somerset refused to allow him to hold services, whether for the soldiers, or the slaves, or “such of the white inhabitants as might be willing to

attend his ministry.” The minister left Cape Town in despair, but the Wesleyans remained firm in their faith.

Another minister, the Rev. T. L. Hodgson, was stoned on the Parade during an open-air service. Hodgson was not dismayed. He went on with his good work, and when he died in the middle of last century, five thousand people attended his funeral.

The famous Rev. Barnabas Shaw was the Wesleyan who bought a ruined mosque in Burg Street, and here the first Metropolitan Church arose. It stood for a century, becoming the Metropolitan Hall when the present church was built on the corner. Probably the most remarkable service held in the old

church was the thanksgiving for the emancipation of the slaves. On the stroke of midnight Shaw rose and announced: "Slavery is dead." The ex-slaves who packed the church tried to sing a hymn of praise, but were overcome by emotion.

Remnants of the old Wesleyan Church in an alley off Barrack Street survived up to about ten years ago. The outer walls and some of the arched windows had remained unchanged. Shaw and Edwards, Archbell, Shrewsbury and the ill-fated Threlfall (murdered by the Hottentots) all preached in this building. A palm tree believed to be older than the Long Street palms stood in the grounds. When it was cut down in 1949 it was still bearing small dates.

Presbyterians also arrived with General Craig and these Scottish soldiers formed a Calvinist Society. For some years, however, the Scots at the Cape were in a "forlorn condition" (as the local newspaper put it); and it was only when a minister arrived, and St. Andrew's Church in Somerset Road was built in 1829, that their problems were solved.

It is clear, nevertheless, that the men of the 93rd Regiment played a large part in establishing their religion at the Cape. The regiment was described as "a pattern of morality and good behaviour." They read their Bibles, observed the Sabbath and saved their money to do good. When funds were needed to build the church, every

man in the Scottish regiment stationed at the Cape gave one day's pay.

St. Andrew's House behind the church was once the manse, but it is no longer the home of the minister. This quiet house is indeed a fragment of Old Cape Town, with a small veranda running along the length of it, a mounting block for horsemen and old cannon. One of the bedrooms was furnished in the style of Marie Antoinette's room in the Trianon at Versailles. The lounge, with its cut glass, tapestry and ornamental clocks under glass domes, was also in the French tradition. I believe St. Andrew's House was once owned by a Cape governor. In 1820 the valuation was two hundred and fifty pounds.

Baptists first came to the Cape with the 1820 Settlers, but they had no church in Cape Town until the eighties of last century. The building which they bought in Wale Street had been an artist's home and studio. There the pupils of Thomas Bowler listened to the man whose originals have become valuable Africana items.

So the handsome Bowler home was demolished and the simple Baptist Church, with its high ceiling, took its place. Baptists may not know that early this century the church was let to the government for a period and used as a police court. The magistrate sat in the pulpit.

Early in 1906 the Supreme Court authorities arranged to use the

court. Tobie Louw, charged with being an accessory to murder, was tried there. The murderer, the notorious Basson, had shot himself when the detectives were about to arrest him.

Mr. Martin Leendertz, a reporter who was present at the Louw trial, told me that Adv. Morris Alexander defended Louw and secured an acquittal. This was a popular verdict. When Louw walked out of the church he was carried shoulder high by the crowd and all traffic was stopped for a quarter of an hour.

The Baptists paid Bowler £1,800 for his house, and sold the site and their church eighty years later for £37,500. Their new church is in

Orange Street, opposite the former S.A.C.S. playing field.

Members of the Congregational Church in South Africa are mainly coloured people and natives, for this church has concentrated on the mission field. David Livingstone administered the sacrament in the ivy-covered Congregational Church at Claremont a century ago. The oak table which he used is preserved in the Kloof Street church; and in the manse is a table made from the almond tree under which Livingstone proposed to Mary Moffatt.

I have often been asked why there are two Lutheran churches in Cape Town. Everyone knows the Evangelical Lutheran Church in

Strand Street, probably the most beautiful old church (with its buildings on each side) in Southern Africa. The German Church, officially known as St. Martin's German Evangelical Lutheran Church at the top of Long Street, came about as a result of a dissident movement.

The Rev. George Stegmann, whose activities I have already mentioned, fell out with the council of the Strand Street church. Taking more than one hundred parishioners with him, he held services elsewhere. This group bought the land at the top of Long Street and built the church. Stegmann left the Lutherans and joined the Dutch Reformed Church; but a new congregation of Germans was formed and a German

pastor took charge. This church has long been noted for its restful garden in a busy city area. Palms and lawns have made a beauty spot.

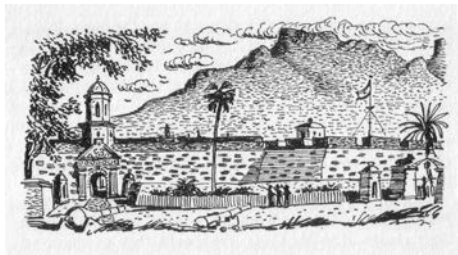
Cape Town's strangest church, I think, was the Round Church at Sea Point. Now only a name, the Round Church was built in 1878 and owned jointly by the Congregational, Presbyterian, Wesleyan and Dutch Reformed churches. Early this century other churches had become available in Sea Point, so the Dutch Reformed paid two thousand pounds and bought out its three partners.

No one can say why the thatched Round Church was built on a narrow, triangular island, or why it was round. I have heard a theory, however, that George Smart, the

builder, suggested a round church so that no one of the four owners could claim precedence. There would be no “denominational corners” if the people sat in circles. Old Sea Pointers often referred to the Round Church as “Solomon’s Temple,” for the celebrated Saul Solomon played a leading part in the enterprise. It is possible that the architect found inspiration in London’s famous round Temple Church.

When it became known in 1931 that the City Council intended demolishing the Round Church to build a fire station, the National Society for the Preservation of Historical Monuments urged the mayor to spare the building. It was argued that the Round Church was a unique and valuable Sea Point landmark. Here

was the result of a combined effort testifying to the essential unity of Christian believers. One of the speakers declared that it was one of four round churches in the world. However, a building fifty years old has no claim as an historical landmark, and the Round Church disappeared. A pharmacy now bears the honoured name.



## **Chapter Six**

### **THE DEVIL AND CHAPMAN**

*To blot from earth's  
vocabulary one  
Of all her names, were to blot  
out the sun.*

ABRAHAM COLES

PLACE-NAMES often hide stories, and sometimes the passing centuries play havoc with an original name and leave us with a mystery. Such names, dramatic and baffling, are to be found in the Cape Peninsula.

I hate to see a fine old place-name changed deliberately, for there is always a danger that some valuable fragment of history may be lost. As a rule it is the wear and tear of the years and careless speech that bring about strange transformations.

Devil's Peak, for example, is an old name with a picturesque legend that everyone knows. But a suspicion has grown up in recent years that the Windberg of the early Dutch settlers was also known as Duiwepiek, Duiwekop or Duiwenberg – the mountain of the doves. You have only to stroll over the slopes to see the bush doves. Devil's Peak is probably an English corruption of a Dutch name. It was not until early last century that the



first version of the legend of Van Hunks and the Devil appeared in a German work.

Charles Peak (after Charles I of England) was a previous name of Devil's Peak, and the English commodore, Fitzherbert, re-named it in 1620 – Herbert's Mount, after himself. These names did not last long.

You may be surprised when I tell you that the first Portuguese explorers placed the name Capo di Diab on their charts – Devil's Cape. No doubt they encountered heavy weather there. Prince Henry the Navigator changed it to Cape of Storms, and the benign Cape of Good Hope followed.

Greatest of all place-name mysteries in the Cape for many years was Chapman's Peak. You can understand a remote koppie with a dim origin but not a precipitous mountain, with a stupendous drive that ranks among the wonders of the world. This peak has been admired by millions, and millions have asked: "Who was Chapman?"

In an earlier discussion (in my book *Grow Lovely, Growing Old*) I quoted a learned opinion in favour of the Kaapmans, a Hottentot tribe, having been at the root of it. There was also an unsupported anecdote about a Dutch admiral naming the peak after an English visitor.

For this is an old name, appearing on maps made before the British occupied the Cape. Bews of Paternoster Row, London, printed a map in 1781 showing Chapman's Bay as an alternative name to Hout Bay. Grandpré, six years later, placed it north of Hout Bay, with the resounding name of Anse de Plettenberg on de Chapman. Burchell mapped it as Spuys Bay.

Searchers in the Cape archives could find nothing to show how Chapman's Peak and Chapman's Bay were named. Historians in all countries, of course, often find difficulty in tracing places with personal names. Kings and princes are easily identified, but all memories may vanish of a humble person.

I think this old mystery has been cleared up at last by Commander W. E. May R.N. of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. He discovered a reference to a Cape Peninsula bay called Chapman's Chance or Chapman's Chace in the sailing directions published very early in the eighteenth century.

The English East India Company employed several men named Chapman. One was a master mariner, another a mate, while a third was a merchant. The word "Chace" may have referred to a hunt on shore. Probably the name Chapman was transferred from the bay to the peak.

Below the peak is Duiker Point, the most westerly point of the Cape

Peninsula, and once known as Chapman's Head. The exact Chapman has still to be identified, and somewhere there may be details of his chase.

Little Lion's Head (near Chapman's Peak) was Zuyckerbroot on the early Dutch charts, because it resembled a lump of sugar. All over the world you find peaks with that name. All names are not so easy to explain.

Sometimes a name arouses controversy by vanishing. Such a one is Hoets Bay, which has nothing to do with Hout Bay, or Hoetjies Bay within the curve of Saldanha. The name Hoets Bay was applied to some inlet in the Cape Peninsula, for it appears in old

documents. There was a Hoets family in Cape Town. People spoke of Hoets Bay, but the name was never recognised by the map-makers and so it has gone.

Another name which has disappeared is De Gevelbergen, the "gable mountains," between Sea Point and Hout Bay. Sir Rufane Donkin thought these peaks and buttresses should be called the Twelve Apostles (though there are really eighteen of them) and he bestowed that general name. The individual names, however, are Blinkwater Peak, Porcupine, Barrier, Valken, Kasteel, Postern, Wood, Spring, St. Peter, St. Paul, St. John, Grove, St. Luke, Judas and Hout Bay Corner. Two peaks have not yet been named, a two

thousand five hundred foot peak between St. Paul and St. John, and another of similar height between St. John and Grove Buttress.

I have studied a Peninsula map made by the survey department eighty years ago, and this reveals a number of names which are never used today. The kloof leading up to the Apostles from Llandudno is called Liermanskloof. (Who was Lierman?) Hout Bay Nek is marked as Victor's Kloof. And the Hout Bay valley is given as Bokkermanskloof. Peaks near Hout Bay are shown as Suther Peak and Captain Peak. Beyond the present Kommetjie (not marked in 1882) is Schoester's Kraal. Not far from Cape Point is the appropriate Uiterste Hoek – a far corner indeed.

This map shows Batsata Rock off Smitswinkel Bay. Was there an ill-fated ship, the *Batsata*, lost there? All my research has been in vain. Smitswinkel Bay beyond Simons-town is not as simple as it looks. The name is more than two centuries old, and I fail to see why Smit should have had a shop there, or why there should have been a smithy on that isolated coast so long ago. It is possible that the name was invented when the dangerous, off lying rocks were named Blaasbalg (the Bellows) and Aanbeeld (the Anvil). Smitswinkel Bay, incidentally, was re-named Patientie Baai late in the eighteenth century, but the earlier name has survived. The sea breaks into a cave there, the spray goes up like a

cloud of smoke, and in that spectacle you may have the true origin of the name.

Pepernyntjies Hoogte is an old Fish Hoek name derived from a species of bird once common beyond the present Sunny Cove station. Another rise near Fish Hoek is known as Good Load, a reference to a long-forgotten incident when Farmer Robert Wilson found someone helping himself to a good load of oats from Wilson's land.

Fish Hoek has an Old Hospital, used during a plague outbreak late last century; and an Old Well close to the old outspan. Above Fish Hoek is Elsies Peak, and not far away are Elsies River and Elsies Bay. The dark past hangs heavily

over that name Elsie; both the Elsie of False Bay and the Elsie of Elsies River and Elsieskraal River on the Cape Flats. True, there was a Juffrou Elsje van Suurwaarde farming in the Tygerberg as far back as the days of Simon van der Stel. Perhaps they named the river after her. But the Fish Hoek Elsie remains a woman of mystery. As I said before, the small people of this world are easily forgotten while the lords and ladies, the Somersets and others, leave no puzzles for us to ponder over.

Before leaving the shores of False Bay I would like you to observe the Silwermyyn River, running along an historic highway and entering the sea at Clovelly. It seems that in Simon van der Stel's time two wicked and mischievous sailors from a Dutch

ship “salted” the rocks by firing silver bullets into the crevices. They may or may not have received a reward when they carried the false news to Cape Town. Certainly they were responsible for much work and expense. The “silvermine” was abandoned, but the name remains.

Macassar, on the other side of False Bay, was named before the end of the seventeenth century. There, of course, Sheikh Joseph and his retinue from Macassar in the East Indies went into exile.

Many people who have lived in Cape Town all their lives would probably be unable to locate such names as Irish Town (which is in Newlands, and is no longer Irish), and Hell Fire Valley in Mowbray. Hell Fire Valley

goes back to the riots which occurred there when the British tommies of last century had a drop too much. It sounds violent, but residents prefer it to the old name of Dooiemankuil. The body of a young man was found hanging from an oak one morning. Some say they still see the ghost of that suicide in “Dead Man’s Pit.”

Cape Town streets had no official names until the Fiscal and two members of the Court of Justice were given the task towards the end of the eighteenth century. Painted boards were then fixed on corner houses, and there was a fine of fifty rix-dollars (ten pounds) for damaging them.

It was easy in those days, but the modern street namer has to rack his

brains if he is to satisfy the majority. Landowners, residents and officials of long ago are often immortalised in this way, though here again there is a risk of later generations losing touch with the past. For example, I once saw a reference to “Wolf Street in Wynberg, the spot where the last wolf was killed.” Wolves have never roamed South Africa; the Afrikaans word wolf refers to the jackals and hyaenas. But the street name is really Wolfe Street, a Major Richard Wolfe having been the first magistrate of the district. His descendants are still living in Wynberg after more than a century.

I was pleased to see Cotton Road appear recently in Simonstown, for I knew this nonagenarian fisherman, and his father, and the island where

both were born, Tristan da Cunha. Late last century the Cottons and others settled in Simonstown during a hard period when the volcanic isle could not support a large population. George Cotton of Tristan Villa in Cotton Road died in 1962 – an old-time whaler who hurled his sharp harpoons by hand. When the whaling ended he fished for a living. He and his father told me of the Tristan treasure which they had sought in vain. Yes, there is a road with a story, plain Cotton Road on the Simonstown hillside. And a path from the main road to Seaforth beach is now called Whaler’s Way, for there they cut up the blubber. Clark’s Steps in Simonstown recall the generous doctor who gave all the land on which the convent now

stands. Simonstown knows how to name its streets.

Claremont has a number of streets named after American presidents. The responsible official must have been in despair at that time. Someone in old Salt River did better when he put such poets as Burns and Coleridge, Tennyson and Shelley on the name boards. Vredehoek (like many other suburbs) relies heavily on flowers – Aandblomstraat, Anemone, Crassula and so on. Athlone prefers birds, from Hamerkopweg to Tarentaalweg.

Poet's Corner in Woodstock was originally Fisherman's Corner because so many of the treknet brethren lived there.

They attended St. Mary's Church. One day the clergyman heard a fisherman's son reciting poetry at Fisherman's Corner; and so well did he speak that the clergyman used his influence and had the name changed.

Toll Gate is a name seen every day on trolley-buses, but you will search in vain for the toll. The main toll was in Sir Lowry Road, where the tramway sheds were built; the other was in Newmarket Street. All the country wagons and carts entered Cape Town by those two routes, and there, up to 1896, the unwilling drivers paid toll. When the trams arrived these tolls were abolished. No doubt there are citizens still living who can remember paying toll.



Drury Lane Theatre, pride of Cape Town a century ago, survives only in grim Drury Lane near the prison in Roeland Street. Rotton Row, also in District Six, has never known the aristocratic riders of its London counterpart, and the name is a mystery. Young people of the neighbourhood call it “Rock ‘n Roll.” I am afraid Rotten Row is in some danger.

Another mysterious District Six place-name is the Dry Dock on the Devil’s Peak slopes. Rows of tenement houses stand above a concrete apron covering a bog which was regarded locally as bottomless. They tell stories of horses and cows that vanished there, some by accident, others by acts of malice and revenge. For a

century the white clay swallowed living creatures. According to District Six legend, this was the spot where clever murderers disposed of their victims – the Dry Dock. No convincing story of the name has ever reached me.

Overlooking the Dry Dock, however, is Lydia School, a good name. Lydia was a slave character who died in 1910 after a lifetime of fine, religious work in a difficult area. Early this century Lydia’s birthday party was one of the events of District Six. They sang and danced and Lydia baked a flat cake on an open fire as she had done during her slave days. Some years after Lydia’s death the school bearing her name was built on the site she had known so well.

Hanover Street was named because Herman Schutte, the great stonemason, came from Hanover and called his mansion (in the present District Six) Hanover House. His fine garden adorned the Devils Peak slopes and became known as Primrose Hill. All this beauty has been overwhelmed by District Six; the residence with its exquisite Anreith fanlight, the garden with its flowers and oaks. But we still have the names, Primrose Street, Summer Hill and Lavender Hill.

Wharf Square, one of the busiest places in Cape Town, is known to few by that name. It is the square outside the main line station off Adderley Street, and it gained the name when the station was close to the sea. Excavations in 1906

revealed a flight of sea-worn steps and a number of “post-office stones.” The wharf came later. Wharf Square is now as far from Table Bay as Waterkant Street, Sea Street, Strand Street and other inland relics of a lost waterfront.

One of Cape Town’s first three streets was Reigerstraat, parallel with Hout and Strand Streets and named after a ship of Van Riebeeck’s fleet. The name deserved to survive, but for some reason it disappeared from the centre of the town.

There is a Lover’s Walk near the university and a Wallflower Street between the factories on Paarden Island. Tamatiestraat is on the city plan, and so is Toffee Lane. Hurricane Street may be found at

Factreton, but Sinister Street has not arisen outside the pages of Compton Mackenzie.

You might think that Leeuwen Street was named because it ran down into the town from the Lion's Rump. But you would be wrong. Johan Leeuwner was a rich man who owned this area late in the eighteenth century, and the original name was Leeuwner Street. Yet another example of the men we forget.

If ever you have to find Krom Elbow Laan, remember that it is indeed a crooked lane between Barrack and Commercial Streets. What a mixture of languages! Not far away is Canterbury Street, named after a barber, a notorious gossip who gave his clients the news while he

shaved them. He also went from house to house with his rumours and his razor. He had strong political views. Canterbury will not be forgotten.

"Onze Jan" Hofmeyr took a keen interest in the street names of Cape Town, and protested against ignorant changes. The present Parliament Street, you may know, was known as Grave Street years ago; and "Onze Jan" pointed out that this was a corruption of De Graaff Street, named in honour of the old governor.

Wale Street still causes arguments, and here indeed is a lost origin. It may have been named because Huguenots settled there. French Protestants were once known in

Holland as “Walen”. But a claim has also been made on behalf of a Wahl family. Wale may be an English corruption of Wahl.

Then there is Venken Lane, which should have been Vinkenlaan according to “Onze Jan.” Venken has no meaning that I can discover, but Vinken, the “lane of the finches” might have made sense years ago. This narrow lane became a sinister place, however, when the birds departed. I knew Venken Lane when the police morgue was there. Constable Kemm, who was in charge, was a man I often had to see when I was a reporter. Thousands of corpses passed through Kemm’s “office”, as he called it; people who had been murdered, drowned, or killed in

accidents. One day during the 1918 influenza epidemic they brought Kemm seventy-two bodies. Venken Lane has an architectural rarity in this city, a bridge between two buildings.

Another little-known lane in this part of Cape Town is the forgotten Vredenbergsteeg near the top of Queen Victoria Street. But in Adrian van der Stel’s time, Vredenberg was the majestic home of Slotzboo, a surgeon in the Company’s service, the officer who also took charge of official buildings, slaves and gravediggers. (Surgeons had to be versatile in those days, and the gravediggers provided an appropriate touch). Slotzboo’s mansion survived until it was replaced by a block of flats.

Within living memory Cape Town had a number of farms within its boundaries. Scholtz Road at Three Anchor Bay reminds us of a farm that covered a large expanse of Signal Hill early this century. Mr. Scholtz had a vineyard where blocks of flats now stand, and his ostriches grazed happily on veld that is now a built-up area.

Moses Beach, a small and secluded beach at Clifton, might puzzle the modern visitor. Once it had a magnificent crop of bulrushes. Bulldozers and builders covered the slopes with rubble and wiped out the obvious reason for the name.

Near the top of Clifton Steps stands Boulder Cottage, and from the garden you may reach the granite

cave known as Cobbler's Hole. It was Schoenmaker's Gat in the eighteenth century, hidingplace of a runaway from the Dutch East India Company's service. This deserter, who may have been a slave shoemaker, roamed the mountain for some time before Corporal van Schutenmare caught him and claimed the reward of five rix-dollars.

Three Anchor Bay sounds very simple, and indeed there is one old anchor still visible in the kelp off Rocklands Beach to this day. But why were the anchors placed there? I have never found a good reason. The local story of a pirate ship dropping anchors to mark a treasure chest may be dismissed as fiction.

Mr. W. F. Fish, a former mayor of Cape Town, wrote his version of the treasure legend in the Cape Argus Christmas number for 1920. He described a pirate with a wife and two small daughters (surely an unusual pirate?) who was marooned at the spot now known as Three Anchor Bay. The pirate was murdered by the Hottentots, for this was before the Dutch occupation of the Cape. One of the daughters married a Van Schoor, and showed him where her father had buried his treasure. The place was marked by three anchors.

I cannot believe that the genial Mr. Fish was serious when he wrote that piece with so much detail. Nevertheless, there is the single bronze anchor which no one has

been able to move – an anchor with an unknown story.

Place-names arouse perpetual interest and often cause more argument than any other branch of folklore. Much must be taken on trust. A great deal of imagination has been used in the effort to solve mysteries in which no solution is possible. Many romances have been created, romances in the field of fiction rather than history.

## Chapter Seven

### MARKET BY THE SEA

*When the great markets by the  
sea shut fast  
All that calm Sunday that goes  
on and on:  
When even lovers find their  
peace at last,  
And Earth is but a star, that  
once had shone.*

JAMES ELROY FLECKER

CAPE TOWN has always been a great market by the sea. Shops came long after the founding of the “ocean tavern,” but the markets arose in Van Riebeeck’s time. It was the Parade, the open space (not yet named) between the mud fort and the first dwellings, that saw the burghers setting up their first

vegetable market. Prices were fixed, and Wednesdays and Saturdays were market days.

Another early market was the *passer*, the place near Rogge Bay where meat and fish were sold. There, too, a buffalo which had been found dead near the settlement was cut up; but as no one wanted to buy this strong meat it was salted for the slaves.

Then came the *basaer*, a morning market with an Eastern name. This hut felt the force of a December south-easter, for the *Journal* relates: “The gale would have blown down the *basaer* had it not just in time been secured with strong supports.”

Early shops were really the homes of the various tradesmen.

Meyboom, a pioneer baker, made a small fortune and it was rumoured that all this could not have come from his bread. He was suspected of plundering a wreck, but this crime (which might have cost him his life) was never pinned on him. Meyboom left eighty thousand Cape gulden.

Skippers of visiting ships must have found the Cape prices higher than they liked. One of them, on his return to Holland in the late seventeenth century, described the new settlement as “a place where burghers obtain a living by keeping lodging-houses and handy shops, selling poultry and eggs, without having the fear of God before their eyes.”

My records of Cape place names reveal that the dull, crowded parking area we know as Greenmarket Square was laid out as a square and used as a market early in the eighteenth century. Known first as Burgerwagtsplein, it was called in turn Groente Market, Stadhuis Plein, Groene Plein, Green Square and Market Square.

Several artists who painted Old Cape Town were attracted by the Malay hawkers squatting under large sunshades with their wares. I wish that I could have watched the chaffering a century ago, before anyone realised that Greenmarket Square was to lose its character under the high buildings.



Riebeeck Square also had earlier names, and it is now almost impossible to explain the changes. Boerenplein I can understand, for the farmers who trekked in from the far interior used it as their outspan. But early last century Boerenplein became Hottentot Square. I know that the last clan of Hottentots lived in a kraal round the spring on Signal Hill and used the square to sell their cattle; but they had departed many, many years before the name Hottentot Square came into use. Riebeeck Square is found in various documents from the middle of last century, but there again I can find no reason for the change of name.

Some of Cape Town's most interesting little shops have flourished in the cellars below the

African Theatre, built in 1800. It became St. Stephen's Church, as everyone knows, but the shops remained. Wine shops were to be found there at various times, and wine matured in the cool dungeons. Some unknown poet chalked an appropriate verse on one of the doors, and this has been preserved:

*The spirit above is the spirit of  
love;*

*The spirit below is the spirit of  
woe;*

*The spirit above is the Spirit  
Divine;*

*The spirit below is the spirit of  
wine.*

*Heigh-ho !*

St. Stephen's has an exceptionally high stoep and stone foundation.

The building plan was dictated by Governor Sir George Yonge, as he wished the farmers coming in with hay and thatch to store it between stone walls. Cape Town dreaded fire in those days, and the theatre building was thus comparatively fireproof. Craftsmen of various trades occupied the dark cellars. When the theatre was new, some were household slaves, making baskets, mending chairs, cobbling harness and footwear.

Criminals sentenced to fifty or more lashes with the cat were flogged in public on Riebeeck Square during the first half of last century. Then the residents complained. No one seems to have been upset by the cruelty, but the

crowds and the shrieks of the tortured men disturbed their siestas.

St. Stephen's has often been described as an old slave market, but there is nothing in the records to support this view. Slaves were sold in various parts of the town, including the square adjoining St. Stephen's. No special building was devoted to the trade.

Three large Cape Town squares were, until 1934, public outspans. Wagon drivers had the right to camp there, light fires and cook their meals. If a farmer with a wagon and cattle had found motorcars in his way, he could have called upon the police to have the cars removed. However, the City Council proclaimed these places as

public squares, not outspans, and another link with the more spacious days, the wider freedom, was snapped.

Cape Town markets came under severe criticism in the middle of last century, and I have read the evidence at an official inquiry. Mr. A. J. Louw, a witness with fifty years' experience, declared that when the farmers sold their produce in Hottentots' Square and other places there was nothing but "shameful deception and confusion." Apparently the simple country folk were met by agents at the Salt River and were deceived over the ruling prices.

Mr. J. B. Hoffmann, who also gave evidence, said that he could

remember the year 1794, when farmers from Graaff Reinet and other distant places brought in butter, soap, tallow and goatskins. Their outspan was Boerenplein, and there were so few buildings that the oxen were able to graze nearby. Brokers called rouselaars bought on account of shopkeepers and exporters. Wine merchants selected their wines there, while bakers purchased loads of wheat. But it was not until the market was established on the other side of the Castle that an honest system of weighing, measuring and paying came into force.

Cape Town lost something in atmosphere (though it gained in amenities) when the Early Morning Market left Sir Lowry Road and moved out to Epping. Though the

buildings were comparatively new, the farmers had been coming in there with loaded carts and wagons since early last century. The ground was levelled by French prisoners-of-war who were brought to the Cape after the capture of Mauritius.

Farmers stacked their huge green watermelons on that open space for one hundred and fifty years. Green castles of cabbage arose there while many thousands of dawns broke over the town. In the morning light the carrots and tomatoes of hopeful bygone farmers shone bravely and made a gay background for chaffering humans.

When that market opened they were selling elephant tusks at two shillings a pound, lionskins, leopardskins,

wild ostrich feathers at five pence a plume. You could have a leaguer of brandy for twelve pounds, a leaguer of wine for only three pounds ten shillings. Almonds were sold by the thousand, (one shilling and sixpence) and for three shillings you could buy one hundred oranges. A hen cost nine pence, but a turkey could not be had for less than three shillings.

I have before me a later market list in which such items as oysters, porcupines and hares appear. Buck of various sorts were plentiful and cheap years ago. Quaggas and the huge game birds called gompou were sometimes available but were never common. Anyone who wanted to thatch a house could buy the reeds there, aloes and acorns

were on sale, and berry wax for candles.

Every farmer passing through the turnpikes into that market had to pay his dues on the spot, giving full details of everything in his wagon. A clerk entered all this in a ledger and gave the farmer a card. Then the farmer passed a sentry at a gate and gave up the card. Naturally there were constant attempts to avoid paying the dues. The authorities countered such wicked tricks by preventing wagons from entering the market grounds after the evening gun signal or before the morning gun.

Look up the market prices in the *Cape Argus*, and you will find that as late as 1859 the conservative

farmers and dealers were still quoting prices in rix-dollars, skillings and stuiwers. Dutch weights and measures were also in everyday use; and some people were only able to think in terms of the “ell,” the “old gallon,” “schepel” and “muid.” Measurers of capacity were the “anker” and the “legger” barrels and casks. Some modern Afrikaans words are based on these terms.

Dr. C. Louis Leipoldt used to haunt the Sir Lowry Road market at the end of last century, soon after the long building for vegetables and fruit had been opened. He told me that he was fascinated by the unusual foodstuffs displayed there. One could sniff rare herbs or carry off a live tortoise. Aromatic berries

known as *duinbessies* were brought to the market from Green Point Common and sold at a penny a pound. They made a grand fruit sauce which was served with meat dishes.

Even a market may have its historic relics. A ship's bell rang the first train out of Cape Town station in 1859, and this bell was handed to the Sir Lowry Road market master in 1912. Every day the bell announced the opening of the sales. Now, mounted in a nautical wheel, it serves the same time-honoured purpose at Epping.

Among the market characters of this century, without a doubt, is Andrew the watermelon catcher. Apparently watermelons must be thrown off the

trucks to a human catcher. As each watermelon weighs between twenty-five and seventy pounds, the catcher must be strong and skilful. Moreover, he must not hug a ripe melon too closely on impact, or it will break. Andrew catches fifty thousand watermelons in a season without one devastating smash, squelch and spatter.

But this is not Andrew's only achievement. As each watermelon flies through the air, before it is caught broadside on, Andrew grades it. In a second he has decided on both quality and size, so that it can go immediately into the right position on the stack. It is back-breaking work, but Andrew has often put in a twelve-hour day without showing a sign of distress. Ten

minutes at that work would be too much for most people.

I was often puzzled by the title “Early Morning Market,” for I bought cauliflowers there at nine in the evening. Cavalcades of Cape Town motorists used to stop there on the way home from the cinema to buy their vegetables. Under the market regulations, farmers were allowed to camp there from four in the afternoon until six the next morning. That was the origin of the title. They could trade until daybreak. Unsold goods were put up for sale by auction in the market hall at eight in the morning.

This went on every Monday, Wednesday and Friday night for many years. There was no rest for

the sellers; but children who accompanied their parents were to be seen in their pyjamas, asleep among pumpkins or peaches.

Housewives saved a lot of money if they were able to shop at the market, and they got really fresh produce. Of course the snag was the quantities which had to be bought. Some solved the problem by forming a club and buying fruit and vegetables for the members.

Last century many people found the Central Market more convenient than Sir Lowry Road. It flourished on the present City Hall site, and the dealers were Malays and other coloured people. Only when Cape Town people began to move out of town to Sea Point, Wynberg and

other suburbs did the market suffer a decline. Boonzaaier's brass band played on Saturday evenings to attract customers, but even this entertainment failed to draw the old crowds. But the Central Market survived until the ground was cleared for the City Hall building. Then the dealers moved reluctantly to Sir Lowry Road.

Rogge Bay fish market (by which I mean the low building so many of you must remember) was opened in 1899, the same year as the Sir Lowry Road market buildings came into use. The older fish market was described by Mrs. Fanny Parkes more than a century ago. She said it was a square-walled enclosure near the jetty where the scene was "curious and animated." Malays,

Hottentots, Bushmen and queer-looking people of all sorts were there, in clothes of gay colours. "They grinned like so many monkeys, all huddled together selling or buying fish."

Carts were filled with enormous crawfish, and there were heaps of silver fish, quantities of Cape salmon, and "fish without scales with long, thin bodies and pointed heads." (Our old friend the snoek). Mrs. Parkes also noted "a number of queer-looking fish with unpronounceable names."

It was hard to find a proper shop in Cape Town up to the end of the eighteenth century, so the Parade and other open-air markets were far more important than they are today.



Soon after the Second British Occupation, however, there were about forty small retail shops in the town. They opened, by order of the Burgher Senate, from sunrise to eleven in the morning, and from three in the afternoon until sunset. Those were Cape Town's siesta years.

Luxuries were available early last century. I have read a "Gazette" announcement by P. Albertus, who was selling up before returning to Europe. He offered "French silks, fans, artificial flowers, velvets and other expensive fabrics; chocolate, eau-de-cologne and other odoriferous waters; gold and silver epaulettes."

Nisbet and Dickson had for sale some "splendid French goods direct from Bordeaux-claret, sauterne, champagne, fruits in brandy, bonbons, olive oil, cheeses, anchovies, sardines in oil, French plums, almonds, capers and Bologna sausages."

Mr. Jones, an auctioneer who advertised in the Cape Town *Commercial Advertiser* during the eighteen-thirties, had rooms on the Parade. His sales must have drawn the crowd. Once he offered "a team of zebras, in excellent condition and very tame". Another time he had three thousand coconuts, just landed.

At that period Mr. Gregory's bazaar in the Heerengracht was selling ladies' kid gloves at four and three

pence for three pairs. Gentlemen bought gloves at three shillings a pair, and also “assorted stuffs for trousers and waist coating, nankeens, Scotch plaids, shalloon, buckskin and duck”.

Heerengracht, that great sluit, had more hotels and homes than shops early last century. You could find Kunhardt the apothecary, John Saunders the confectioner, Twentyman the watchmaker. Engelbrecht had his store near the Tronk, where the town loafers watched the victims of the treadmill. There, too, was the Ship Tavern. Livery stables and saddlers were in the main street. But on high stoeps between the shops, and shaded by firs, sat residents over their coffee. Only the slaves worked between

high noon and three in the afternoon. All the shops and the Commercial Exchange were closed.

More gorgeous than any shop front in those days was the stoep of the George Hotel, a first-class hotel. Indian servants wore white gowns and turbans. Indian officials emerged and stepped into their palanquins.

St George's Street had few shops in the middle of last century. Perhaps the most famous was Baron von Ludwig's snuff shop; though the hard work behind the counter was done by the baroness. This left the baron free to roam his wonderful garden in Kloof Street. However he left his thousands of plants every afternoon to fetch the baroness in his coach with four chestnut horses.

Raymond the French dentist and Miss Rudd the dancing mistress had their rooms in St. George's Street. Most of the printers were there, and it was the street of the brokers. But you did not go shopping there except for tobacco and snuff.

Among the first local products to be sold in Cape Town were brandy, silk, wagons and shoes. Baked and glazed earthenware did not last long, and Eva the Hottentot was given the house occupied by "those lazy fellows the potters". Soap and candles were more satisfactory. Woollen hats, biscuits, snuff and "segars" appeared on the counters as the years passed. Straw bonnets came later.

Missions in the country sent odd items into Cape Town for sale. For example, knives made at Baviaan's Kloof were offered in 1801 by a Longmarket Street shop. They were known *as boschlemmers*, and were in great demand until imported knives arrived at lower prices. Genadendal, later in the century, imitated the famous Madeira chairs, and sold their *taaibos* versions at ten shillings apiece.

Thomas Hunter had a machine shop as far back as the eighteen-thirties, and he undertook "metal turning and cutting, the founding of bells of any size, all ships' work, and the making of wrought and cast-iron railings round family vaults".

Hatfield, a traveller of the eighteenth-forties, described Cape Town as a place of low whitewashed buildings, green venetians, sign boards, but without shop-windows. However, he had missed a show-place, Mrs. Graham's shop, which had a glass front at that time.

Soda water was on sale in the Cape Town shops more than a century ago. Cape jams were advertised at that period. There was also a local toymaker named Tabeya, who lived in Groene Steeg, and one Salom who imported Chinese toys and puzzles. Perlemoen shells were sold to visitors as curios, but no one had thought of painting ostrich eggs.

Crinolines were first displayed in the Cape Town shops in 1857, but

no great demand for them arose until the following year. The arrival of fashionable women from England, wearing these uncomfortable garments, forced the local society belles to buy crinolines, "white, drab or fluted". For more than a decade the shops imported these great hooped dresses. Servants insisted on wearing the same styles of bonnets and crinolines as their mistresses.

Matches were imported until 1884, when the Scotia factory opened in Cape Town. Soon afterwards Captain King was making fish jelly and canning fish in the jelly extracted from the bones.

Cape Town shopkeepers kept snuff boxes on their counters last

century, replenished almost daily because the snuff became stale. "Help Yourself" appeared in gilt letters on the lid. It was good for business, and a large packet of "rose snuff" cost only a few pence.

The happy yet harassing custom of Christmas shopping is barely a century old in Cape Town. For the first two centuries, Christmas was observed almost entirely as a religious holiday, without presents or plumpudding.

When the year 1858 arrived, however, William Clydesdale was selling mince pies from noon Christmas Eve to noon Christmas Day. Study the advertisements and you find that many imported wines and Dutch gin were on sale, but not

a word about whisky. Strange to say, whisky had not yet gained devotees outside Scotland. The gentry despised it, though it was to be had for one shilling and two pence a bottle! Some years later, however, Jamieson's four-year-old whisky was on sale at thirty-six shillings a case.

Bockel's German bazaar in Loop Street notified customers in the 'eighties that "a beautiful Christmas tree is lighted up every evening and is open for inspection by old and young". Saul Solomon the printer was selling assorted perfumes as Christmas presents: Triple Jockey Club and Triple Ylang Ylang.

Almanacs were given away at Christmas, and the Cape Argus described one as follows: "Mr. J. W. Irwin distributes as pretty a wall almanac as we have ever seen. A young lady with eyes of 'himmel' blue turns coyly round and peeps at the beholder from beneath the brim of a dainty hat".

Christmas entertainments were provided free by certain shopkeepers in the eighteen-nineties. One shop in Plein Street put on a "doll show" for children, while another engaged a Mr. C: Wyvern, "first violinist to the Emperor of Brazil".

Throughout his life my father always spoke of the huge Adderley Street store as "Thorne and

Stuttaford". The site was once occupied by the Colonial Bank. This was a house where, as I have said, the captains who sailed with the great navigator James Cook signed their names with diamonds on the small window-panes.

Thorne and Stuttaford, founders of the highly successful firm, arrived in Cape Town just over a century ago. Stuttaford's once raised a company of soldiers from its staff, with Richard Stuttaford as the officer. It was during the South African War, when Smuts approached Cape Town, and volunteers were wanted to defend the district. The firm not only supplied the men but also their uniforms and equipment.

I have been unable to trace Cape Town's pioneer pawnbroker, but I imagine that this is the type of business which looks much the same today as it did a century ago. Watches and rings, musical instruments and jewels, do not change much. Of course, many other objects are placed on the counter, and sometimes accepted.

"Uncle" Hymie Berks of Long Street was offered white rabbits and parrots, crutches, artificial legs, a cart and horse and a bottle of tomato sauce. And a customer who expected to find anything under the three brass balls turned away disappointed when Hymie Berks failed to supply a diver's suit.

Perhaps the most suitable partnership to be found among the Cape Town firms of the past was that of Coffin and Deth, undertakers. They had a building in Buitengracht Street. On the first floor a religious organisation had set up a painted sign reading: "Where will you spend Eternity?" Just below it was the notice: "Consult Coffin and Deth".

Among the old family business of Cape Town, one of the oldest indeed is the hardware firm of George Findlay. It started in 1838, supplying harness, springs and trek gear. Right up to 1912 the firm sent a traveller through Namaqualand every year with a buck wagon. He spent three months on the road, returning with a sheaf of orders.

Old hands at Findlay's tell the true story of the day when the buck wagon was replaced by a motor-car. Bad news reached the firm from Namaqualand; the traveller had broken his wrist while cranking the engine. When the traveller returned, the firm's chairman, a powerful man, decided to give the traveller a lesson in starting the engine. Everyone who could be spared went out into the street to watch. The chairman cranked vigorously – and broke his wrist.

This firm stocks the traps used by farmers for catching such marauders as jackals and hyenas. One day a farmer inspected all the traps in the showroom and then asked for something larger. Under a pile of junk in the store they uncovered an

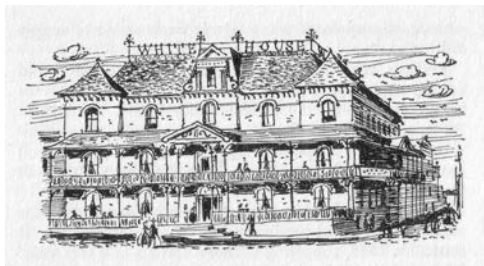
enormous slagyster which had been gathering dust for decades.

“That is exactly what I want”, declared the farmer.

“So you've got leopards on your farm”, remarked the salesman, gazing at the great trap.

“Oh no”, replied the farmer. “I want that thing for the young men who come after my daughters at night.”





## **Chapter Eight**

### **TAVERNS IN THE TOWN**

MY GUIDE to the Cape Town of 1904 lists some fine, picturesque old hotels and other famous places of refreshment. Some of them have been demolished in spite of their great popularity with a bygone public. Others like the Mount Nelson are still flourishing and still providing me with a splendid dinner now and then. At the Mount Nelson the wine comes with the food – not with the coffee. Years ago the Mount

Nelson had its own borehole, and filtered the water. It employed a full-time orchestra. And not long after the opening, a motor-garage was provided. Mount Nelson is a name much older than the hotel. The origin is hard to determine. Nelson called twice at the Cape as a midshipman in the seventeen-seventies. There is a theory that he spent a short period on shore, in a house in the Gardens owned by the Royal Navy, and that the property was named after him when he became famous.

It is clear from the deeds that the hotel area was first granted to Governor van Rheede van Oudtshoorn in 1746. Walls were built, orchards and vineyards laid out. This estate was cut up into three lots, and in the eighteen-twenties

these lots were named La Belle Alliance, Trafalgar and Mount Nelson.

Among the ships that brought the 1820 Settlers was *La Belle Alliance*, and her master, Captain John Smith, had served under Nelson in H.M.S. *Victory*. It has been stated that Captain Smith, who settled in Cape Town, was responsible for naming the three properties.

John Ross the merchant lived on the Mount Nelson estate in the middle of last century, and it was sold to Sir Donald Currie when Ross died at the end of last century. So the Union-Castle Line came into the picture and planned the Mount Nelson as the first really luxurious hotel in Southern Africa.

The architects followed the Swiss plan, giving the hotel wide wings to let the sun into the rooms. When the hotel opened early in 1899, the manager and the whole skilled staff had been imported from Switzerland.

Mr. Winston Churchill stayed there as a war correspondent during the South African War and wrote this tribute: "It is a most excellent and well-appointed establishment which may be thoroughly appreciated after a sea voyage." No doubt he admired the Nelson bust, carved from timber from H.M.S. *Victory*, which still adorns the entrance hall. Newspaper reports of the opening mention the magnificent cellars: twenty thousand bottles, mainly of imported wines.

Those were the days when hotels of the Mount Nelson class were out-of-bounds to “other ranks”. Canadian troops in Cape Town resented the “officers only” rule. One private, a crack shot, forced his way into the Mount Nelson bar and picked off half a dozen bottles with his revolver. Whisky cost only four shillings a bottle at that time, so the bill for damages was not very heavy. Of course he had the military police to deal with as well.

Certainly the Mount Nelson had various claims to fame in those far-off days. But the International was unique; its advertisement in the 1904 guide boasted of “the largest and longest stoep in South Africa.”

Both the White House and the Black Horse hotels were in existence when my 1904 guide was published. You will search Longmarket Street in vain for the Black Horse, described as “an old-fashioned, quiet resort run on English lines, like the cosy old bars at home.” The advertisement added: “Mr. W. R. Morgan, the jovial proprietor, takes a special interest in his customers, so that they can refresh the inner man with oysters and stout, fried soles, lobster salad and shrimps.”

Cape Town had a White House Hotel in Strand Street long before the present, elderly building arose. The first White House was at No. 28, Strand Street, where the celebrated scholar Dr. Changuion

opened a school in 1842. The school closed when Changuion left for Europe eighteen years later, and the hotel opened. Mrs. Kruger, wife of “Oom Paul”, stayed there when she visited Cape Town.

Mr. Peter Haylett sold 28, Strand Street and in 1890 he built the present White House at the Long Street corner. He took the iron-work from the high stoep of the old hotel, and installed it on the new stoep. It is still there; but a handsome antique oil lamp, remembered by many old-timers, has vanished. Haylett kept a small zoo in the backyard; baboons and monkeys, buck and a small tame hippo.

One of my old men told me that when the first “talking machine” reached Cape Town from England, the salesman gave a demonstration in the White House Hotel lounge. The phonograph man put a blank wax cylinder on the machine, and recorded a local singer’s effort. The audience was completely staggered when the singer’s voice came out of the trumpet.

Dr. C. Louis Leipoldt, the medical specialist, poet, author and gourmet, learnt Cape cookery in the White House Hotel kitchen. The cook was a fat Malay woman named Hanna and she prodded Leipoldt with a wooden spoon whenever he made a mistake.

Splendid breakfasts were the rule in those days before diets, and young Leipoldt had a choice of sosaties with fried bananas and fried eggs, spiced sausages grilled over a wood fire, cold game, chicken and ham. Another hotel of Leipoldt's youth often had partridge pie for breakfast, and chops done in batter and served with yellow rice.

Cape Town lost five bars and hotels of fond memory in 1959 – the Victoria, Thatched Tavern, Langham, Johannesburg and Old England. All of them had refreshed their customers for more than half a century.

I think the old Victoria Bar had the most character. At first it formed part of the Victoria Hotel, at the corner of

Longmarket and Parliament Streets, and it was a great rendezvous of racing men in the eighteen-eighties. This landmark was taken over in 1902 by Miss C. A. ("Ma") Verrier, who gave the bar the sort of personal supervision which creates legends. Miss Verrier was a smiling hostess, but she became annoyed when anyone sat on the polished mahogany bar. "This counter," she would remark sharply, "is for glasses, not arses."

"Ma" Verrier married the attorney who represented the liquor trade, A. J. MacCallum, during World War II, and only then did she give up the licence. Some years later the building was pulled down and the licence was transferred to Long Street.

The Johannesburg was a great meeting-place for rugby players, while the Langham was mainly a racing man's pub. Both were in Long Street. The Old England, in Wale Street, was one of the oldest taverns in the town. However, I think the Thatched Tavern in Greenmarket Square was older.

Old prints show the eighteenth-century Thatched Tavern as a single-storey building which may have been a private house. It made a gracious picture for some artist in water-colours in 1829, with its single gable, small-paned windows, half-doors and thatch. About ten years later, however, the thatch disappeared and another storey was built with a flat slate roof. It was in 1938 when a new liquor act called for more bedrooms

that the Thatched Tavern was again rebuilt, in red brick this time with three storeys.

Among the unusual details of the old Thatched Tavern were underground wine cellars, a spiral staircase, and a huge open fireplace in the kitchen. At one period there were a few ship's swivel chairs which puzzled some people, but not me. I had one myself, bearing the same carved insignia: "Empreza Nacional, Lisbon." Those chairs came from the Portuguese liner *Lisboa*, lost in 1910 near Pater-noster.

The Thatched Tavern was bought by the Argus Company for use as a garage. Fortunately this was no historic monument, and the only

mourners were the printers who lost a pleasant and convenient place of refreshment.

“Time gentlemen please” came for the Central Hotel in Longmarket Street two or three years before the closing of the bars I have just mentioned. I used to have an excellent lunch at the Central between the wars for two shillings; possibly the finest value in town. In the Central Bar, time stood still for a century. Not a change was made in the tiled floors, the gleaming woodwork, the great mirrors bearing the names of bygone brands of whisky. Mr. A. C. Smythe, the last manager of the hotel, took his first glass of beer in the Central in 1900. There were four barmaids in those days. The

barmaids departed, but the Central went on. Then the doors closed for the last time. “Time gentlemen please.”

I can remember the happy days when the bars of Cape Town entered into an expensive battle to lure customers by means of tastier and larger free snacks. Fish cakes, squares of fried bacon on toast, meat balls and slices of polony were succeeded by plates of tripe and onions, hot stews, curry and rice or crawfish<sup>3</sup> with salad. You

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<sup>3</sup> I prefer the older name crawfish, as the lobster has claws while the crawfish has feelers. Crayfish, of course, are found in fresh water, crawfish in the ocean. True lobsters, with claws, are caught in Cape

could pay nine pence for a glass of beer and consume food worth a shilling.

Lunch is no longer free, but the bar counters and lounges of Cape Town still compete for customers. Some of them serve a three or four course lunch in their dining-rooms for as little as three shillings – soup, fish, a meat dish, sweets and coffee.

You can have fried fish and chips, or cold meat and salads, in many a bar for two shillings. Grilled steak with vegetables or roast veal comes to half a crown. No one is obliged

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waters, but they are so rare that one comes up in the net about every seven years.

to order a drink, but nearly everyone does.

Nevertheless, another of my old men declares that Cape Town is not so open-handed today as it was sixty years ago. "I've seen a man order a tickey sherry and help himself to a full meal from the plates on the bar counter," recalled this ancient. "Then he would cadge a cigarette from the barmaid. 'Bless my soul, I've got no matches,' the scrounger would say, and the barmaid would give him a box free. Finally the man borrowed the day's newspaper, stretched himself out on a sofa and spent an hour reading it, and then left the bar with the paper in his pocket."



Yes, there were taverns in the town in those days, and they gave you full value for three pence.

For decades the Cape Town station restaurant was the favourite resort of hundreds of selective diners-out. It is not fashionable to dine at a railway station in Europe – with one exception in Paris – but in Cape Town it was regarded as the thing to do. Often on Saturday nights there would not be a bona-fide traveller in the whole, handsome, panelled, Victorian room.

That fine caterer Paul (the late Guiseppe de Paoli) was head waiter at the station restaurant before he went to Kelvin Grove. He knew the tastes of General Smuts, a diner

who ate little but required the best. General Smuts arranged for Paul to look after the Royal Family in 1947 at the City Hall banquet. Paul also knew how to prepare a perlemoen for Paul Sauer and a pancake for Prime Minister Strijdom.

I am an admirer of some railway catering. If it is not superb, it does give you value all the way down the scale. And the Blue Train is a sheer pleasure. Just study this dinner menu as an example:

*Tomato juice*

*Chicken cream soup*

*Fried Cape salmon with tartare  
sauce*

*Lamb cutlets with red wine sauce*

*Asparagus with butter sauce*

*Roast turkey and stuffing*

*Sirloin of beef with horseradish  
sauce*

*Spinach, gem squash, cauliflower,  
potatoes*

*Creme caramel*

*Pears with cream*

*Cheese Biscuits Coffee*

Mr. Victor Reitz, the railway catering manager, invented a dish which he named after himself, Avocado Reitz, an avocado pear garnished with diced crawfish, white sauce and parmesan cheese, and then baked.

Chef D. G. van Vuuren, a Blue Train expert, devised a special Karoo lamb dish. He dips lamb cutlets in melted butter, rolls them in breadcrumbs mixed with chopped ham, and cooks them

gently in butter. Then comes the sauce. He combines a poivrade or peppery sauce with a brown sauce, and adds a garnish of gherkins, ox-tongue, hard-boiled white of egg, mushrooms and truffles. After boiling the sauce slowly for ten minutes, he adds a mixture of red wine and quince jelly and serves hot after simmering. This ambitious array of flavours blends wonderfully with the lamb.

However, I really have no right to include the Blue Train among the restaurants of Cape Town, because you can only stare wistfully through the windows at the glittering tables. Then the whole scene is snatched away from you just as the stewards are getting ready to serve a magnificent lunch.

Two hard-working, clever men who could neither read nor write were in business as cafe-owners when my 1904 guide appeared. Both had come to Cape Town a few years previously from Madeira. They were confused with each other for more than half a century because both were known to their customers as “Joe”. Thus both owned “Joe’s Cafe”. In fact, neither bore the name of Joe.

Manuel Netto opened his first cafe in Barrack Street in 1900. That was a tough neighbourhood and Netto often remarked: “A man has to be able to use his fists as well as a frying-pan in this place.” He understood his customers, and before he died in 1957, Netto owned eight cafes.

Manuel Bairos was the other Madeiran, and he ran the renowned Joe’s Cafe at the corner of Longmarket and Corporation Streets. It was said that he never allowed a penniless man who entered his cafe to go away hungry. Netto owned a farm and other valuable properties when he died in 1958. Uneducated, generous but shrewd, the man who had landed with five pounds in his pocket had made a fortune. Both these Joes spent a lot of time claiming to be the “Original Joe.” A pity their customers labelled both of them with the same name.

A third small cafe-owner who made a name for himself during the first six decades of this century was Nicholas Couvaras, a Greek. Nick

sold fruit to Cecil Rhodes in his early days, for his shop was close to Rondebosch railway station. But the customers who really supported Nick were schoolboys from the Diocesan College, Rondebosch Boys' High School and St. Joseph's. A boy who had lost his train fare or season ticket could always rely on Nick for a small loan, and such favours were not forgotten.

Greatest of all the Greek caterers of Cape Town was Elias Georgeu of the Waldorf, who died in 1961. He was at the market at six in the morning, he worked until midnight on seven days a week-and he passed the age of eighty.

Georgeu landed very early this century and started his first cafe in Somerset Road. Ten years later he had the more fashionable Maxim's (opposite the old Opera House) and soon after World War I he opened the first Waldorf in Adderley Street.

Waldorf Corner, opposite Cartwright's Corner, was a marvellous site for a cafe. Probably it was too good to last, for he moved to St. George's Street in 1929. I had more lunches that I can count in those two restaurants when I was a reporter. The half-crown allowed by the Cape Argus for lunch in town covered an ample meal at that time. Now you pay twice as much for a crawfish cocktail.

One of the old Waldorf menus lies before me. A special lunch of babotie with rice, apple jelly and custard, roll, butter, tea or coffee, was served at two shillings. You could have hors d'oeuvres for a shilling, soup for sixpence, fish and chips for a shilling, or a Waldorf special mixed grill for half-a-crown. Roast duck and apple sauce was half-a-crown in those days. The only snag was that one had to think before spending half-a-crown on one dish, however rich it might be. After all, one might want cheese to follow, and that would cost an additional tickey!

## **Chapter Nine**

### **SOHO OF THE SOUTH**

*Serenely full, the epicure  
would say,  
Fate cannot harm me, I have  
dined today.*

SYDNEY SMITH

FOR SOME reason I am fond of buying food and wine. I know, better than some housewives the places in Cape Town where crabs and oysters, unusual cheeses and tender meat are sold. Aromas surrounding bakers and coffee roasters inspire me, and the Greek who sets out his fresh vegetables and fruit in a clever medley of perfumes and colours is sure of my appreciation. Wine casks exude the

rich atmosphere which really makes me think.

My women friends tell me they regard food buying as a duty or a bore, while the mere approach to a wine merchant is an ordeal. Well, I know what I am doing, and it is a pleasure.

Those who are interested in good living are sure to find that this old tavern of the seas is also a Soho of the south, catering for the kitchens of many nationalities. Nowhere in the southern hemisphere is the local cookery tradition built up on so many exotic blends.

When my Cape Town guide was published sixty years ago, well-to-do people relied heavily on imported foods. Lewis, Sims, those



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old-fashioned poulterers whose passing I deplore, had a picture of their shop in the 1904 guide. The whole front was festooned with pheasants, partridges, grouse and hares from Britain, with a few springbok and steenbok to give variety. Six expert poulterers in baize aprons stood by with their sharp knives.

Lewis, Sims advertised their Devon and Wiltshire butter, cream and cheeses. They had Severn and Wye salmon, trout, eels, halibut, plaice, smelts and shrimps; all these imported fishes in a seaport where, even in those days, there was a large fishing fleet. No one in Cape Town had thought of making haddock or kippers.

No one ever imagined that the distinguished visitor might like to taste the Cape dishes. My parents attended a lunch at Groot Constantia in 1910 in honour of the Duke and Duchess of Connaught and Princess Patricia, and I have the tremendous menu before me. They started with caviar, prawns in aspic, Scotch salmon mayonnaise and lobster salad. Entrees included foie gras, game pie, lamb tongues, fowl and mutton cutlets. (No doubt a famous Piccadilly firm supplied some of those items). Then came the fillet of beef, roast lamb, York ham and ox tongue, followed by roast pheasant and truffles, spring chicken, roast grouse, and turkey with chestnut stuffing.



Cheeses were Stilton and Gorgonzola. Wines of the estate were served – sauvignon blanc, hermitage, cabernet and sweet Constantia. Guests also had a choice of French champagne, Scotch whisky, Van der Hum<sup>4</sup> and Cape peppermint liqueurs.

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<sup>4</sup> Van der Hum, the name, remains a complete mystery, and all the wild guesses are unconvincing. It is known, however, that the first Van der Hum appeared on the Cape market very early last century, and was made by Sebastian van Renen of Constantia. I wish that he had left some explanation of the name that became famous. Dr. Louis Leipoldt was baffled by the name, like everybody else. The earliest recipe

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he was able to trace was the Schwabe family recipe dated 1836. Thanks to Mrs. K. Murray Wilson of Rondebosch I am able to give you a very palatable Van der Hum recipe which is an heirloom in the Myburgh family:

Peel 35 *nartjies*, cut up the skins and pour six bottles of brandy over the peel. Add 1½ oz. cinnamon, 17 cloves, three cardamom seeds and a pinch of stamped mace. Allow the brandy to draw on the peels and flavouring for a fortnight in a closed container. Then make a syrup of five lbs. of sugar to 2½ bottles of water. Boil for one hour. When cool, strain the brandy and flavouring on to the syrup, mix well and bottle. L.G.G.

Nevertheless, the accent lay heavily on imported delicacies.

Ten years later the citizens of Cape Town entertained Lord Buxton, the Governor General, to dinner at the City Hall. Fashions in food were changing. After the hors d'oeuvres and the clear soup came Cape sole with Groot Constantia white wine and chicken with red wine from the same estate.

Blesbok was the next item, and then turkey; and with these dishes the drink was whisky! It was entirely wrong, of course, but some highly-placed personage must have liked a drop of whisky with his buck or turkey. Asparagus was served with Sweet Constantia, queer partners indeed, and port

with the chocolate cream and the jelly. Clearly, someone was trying to be different.

Fourteen more years pass by, and again there is a Groot Constantia lunch, this time in honour of Prince George. The pendulum has swung over in favour of South African grapefruit, roast turkey and sausage, roast duckling, roast springbok and quince jelly, Wellington ham, steak and giblet pie, corned ox-tongue, salads and hot potatoes. A compote of South African fruits and cream, jam tartlets and cheese wound up an excellent selection of summer dishes.

Nowadays a State banquet is composed of South African food—

stuffs cooked in the traditional South African manner. For example, a Government House dinner in 1958 opened with Port Natal fruit flavoured with ginger, egg soup with spiced crumbs, and creamed Cape rock lobster. Onderveld chicken pie with yellow rice and stewed dried peaches came next, asparagus with sour sauce, and then larded Karoo leg of mutton baked in red wine, and served with guava jelly, candied sweet potatoes, onion salad, pickled gherkins and the more usual vegetables. The sweet courses were Old Dutch jam tarts with custard, and spiced peaches with meringue custard.

Another banquet at Government House opened with Cape melon

with anisette, cream of mushroom soup and fried sole. Creamed chicken with white rice followed, then iced asparagus, and roast saddle of lamb with four side dishes – quince jelly, pumpkin puree, nectarine salad and dry bean salad. Spiced pears were among the sweets. Porterville contributed some of the decorations, rare disas which were displayed in huge silver bowls.

Now here is another and rather different dinner which gave Mr. Harold Macmillan an idea of the Cape tradition. It was held at the Castle. Melon with Kummel (the caraway and coriander liqueur) was the opening dish. Cape salmon came next. Roast venison was served with apple jelly, roast

potatoes, green peas, carrots and green beans. Cheese savoury came before the peach bavaroise. Simple and good, provided you like venison, I daresay the hosts found out in advance that Britain's prime minister did like venison.

Now I can hear some of you saying that the old Cape dishes can only be tasted at their best if you happen to be invited to a State banquet. I agree that such dishes are not easy to find except in those old Cape homes where the art is kept alive.

As far back as 1833, I have discovered, an "all Cape products" dinner was given by the Cape of Good Hope Agricultural Society. Even the rice had been grown on a Clanwilliam farm. Hotels seldom

put on such dinners nowadays, and a special Cape dish has usually to be ordered in advance.

Some years ago the Queen's Hotel at Sea Point served a South African dinner every Wednesday. These menus included avocado pears, fricadels with fried egg, sosaties, babotie, roast haunch of springbok, pickled springbok chasseur, chicken with sweetcorn, guinea-fowl with pineapple, guava jelly and Cape gooseberry tartlets. No doubt there will be a revival of this sort of catering one of these days.

Let me say that the chefs of the South African Railways often prepare the Cape dishes with considerable skill. Grilled snoek with butter sauce, pickled fish,

tomato bredie, melkert and other old favourites appear regularly on the railway menus.

Study these menus and you will notice first of all the absence of any typical South African soup. There is thick bean soup, the *boontjiesop* of many a farmhouse; but I think that came from Europe. Leipoldt delighted in sweet fruit soups made from loquats or paw-paw blended with cream and wine and thickened with rice flour. He also enjoyed avocado pear soup. Mashed avocado is seasoned with brandy, lemon juice, mustard and salt and then mixed with boiling stock thickened with a yolk of egg. A dash of Worcestershire sauce completes the recipe for this unusual soup. However, I imagine

that Leipoldt and his cook invented some of the fruit soups. Such soups are rarely seen in South Africa.

*Kaapse wynsop* may be a genuine product of the Cape; a wine soup made with milk and sweet wine, and seasoned with nartjie peel, nutmeg, cassia, allspice, ginger and aniseed and thickened with egg-yolks and butter.

Fish soups are served occasionally at the Cape, a very good crawfish soup and a so-called Bisque Blaauwberg which is a puree of mussels. But those are clearly soups of European origin.

Fish babotie, a baked fish pudding, or fish bredie, would not be out of place on an all-Cape menu. You can make a memorable fish stew

with sole, Cape salmon, galjoen, mussels, oysters and pre-cooked perlemoen. Cook in fish stock and wine with bouquet of herbs and crushed garlic, and season with paprika and salt. Serve on fried *croutons* with some of the sauce poured over, and decorate with parsley. This is a fairly expensive dish, of course.

Trout seldom appears on South African menus, but my Sea Point fishmonger sells trout now and again. Steamed trout with wine sauce, or grilled trout with lemon butter and parsley potatoes, make a change from the sea fish.

Mushrooms do not play a large part in the Cape cuisine because so many people fear them. Even the

coloured people of the *platteland* seem never to have learnt to pick the pink-gilled field mushroom and stamp on the toadstool with white gills.

Mushroom-lovers like myself regard the Cape Peninsula and the surrounding countryside as a mushroom paradise. Many varieties are found, including the large Cep (the *Boletus edulis*) which the French adore. The Cep appears from April to the end of June, some of them large as sunshades. Indeed, a giant Cep with a diameter of sixteen and a half inches, found at Kirstenbosch in 1955, was probably a world record. Many a good Cep has been picked in the oak woods above Newlands.

You can dry the Cep and it will not lose its flavour. Dried cultivated mushrooms are useless even for soup powder, but the wild dried Cep will flavour a stew months after it has been picked. Remember, though, that some people find mushrooms indigestible. Do not eat large quantities. Mushrooms are not for the invalid. Their greatest value lies in their mysterious way of bringing out subtle flavours of other foods in the same dish.

More than three hundred varieties of mushroom and toadstool grow within sixty miles of Cape Town. About a dozen are slightly poisonous. Three are dangerous and often deadly. – The European Death Cup, the Cape Death Cup

and the Panther. Beware of all fungi with white gills.

Among the rare veld plants of the Cape is the wild asparagus that Van Riebeeck found on Table Mountain, the same plant that Cecil Rhodes picked at Groote Schuur for his own table. The long, thin spears should be steamed and served in the usual way with melted butter.

Ordinary asparagus, grown at Constantia, goes to London in August, when very little fresh asparagus is available. There is a good demand.

Wild cabbage or *veldkool*, wild fennel and wild aniseed are other edible veld plants. But the one that nearly everyone knows is the *wateruintjie*. I suppose one could

hardly expect to find a *wateruintjie bredie* at a State banquet, for this is regarded as one of the humblest of dishes. Every year in the spring, when I drove over the Killarney bridge on my way back from Blaauwberg Strand by the old road, I used to see the coloured women picking the *waterblommetjies* in the Diep River, and I paid them two shillings for three large bunches. You need fat mutton, chopped sorrel leaves, and plenty of onions to make the traditional *bredie* from these sweet-smelling flowers. There indeed is a dish redolent of the Cape.

Blesbok and springbok were chosen at the banquets I mentioned, but the finest of all venison is grilled eland steak. Not many farmers breed eland for their meat, so this must be

counted among the rarities. Smoked kudu biltong is another delicacy seldom encountered, but it has a flavour as rich as smoked salmon.

By the way, I believe in cream sauce with roast venison. I had this with my reindeer in Norway, and found it far superior to the jellies served in South Africa. Cream sauce also goes well with the wine. Red currant jelly does not.

Many species of game birds are bred and reared by farmers nowadays, so that Scotch grouse are unlikely to appear at future banquets. (Scotch whisky holds its own everywhere). I used to enjoy the quail from Durbanville and the Perdeberg after those great October days when I marched through the wheat where



the quail nest, ready to fire at the first cry of: “*Kwotkwot ... kwotkwot.*”

Quail are unpredictable in their whirring flight, hard to shoot, hard to recover, and you need a lot of them to make a meal. When you have them, roast them with vine leaves and fat bacon over their breasts. Serve on buttered toast with gravy and a bread sauce.

Ostrich eggs were on sale at nine shillings apiece in a Cape Town shop where I often find unusual food. I do not recommend these eggs unless you happen to come across them on the veld, without an owner. The flavour is much less civilised than the hen's egg, and they are best eaten scrambled. Add some minced onion

and grated cheese to disguise the coarse flavour.

Even in the days of imported banquets the Cape fruit was rightly considered suitable for any guest. Which is the best fruit? A matter of taste, naturally, but London experts who deal in the world's fruit are inclined to place Cape peaches at the top of the list. Canned peaches from South Africa have gained higher marks than California's finest brands.

Avocado pears are exported in transparent bags with recipes attached. Buyers are advised to slice them into small cubes and use them with tomatoes and lettuce in salads. Another method is to mash them with salt, pepper and lemon

and serve with crawfish or other sea foods. Or you can have them as hors-d'oeuvres, mashed and seasoned with tomato sauce, chopped onion, salt and pepper.

Cape grape exporters send a case of grapes free to every centenarian they can trace in Britain. I never heard of a link between grape-eating and longevity, but it is a good idea.

Even in fairly recent years the banquet-planner was forced to provide imported cheese. Not until after World War II did the South African cheese producer have anything but sweetmilk and cheddar to offer. Even today I would not place the abundant but immature cheddar

anywhere near the top of the list. Fortunately there is a wide choice.

Scores of cheese factories are turning out South African versions of the famous cheeses of Europe. Cheeses reminiscent of red-coated Gouda, goaty Roquefort, pale Gruyere, strong Limburger and creamy Camembert are all made within our borders. Tilsiter, that mild and piquant cheese to which the Germans add caraway seed, now comes from Ceres. If you are keeping your weight down you can have skim-milk cottage cheese, one of the world's oldest cheeses. England's famous Cheshire cheese, with its rich and inimitable flavour, has a South African cousin known as "Chessa."

Call it an inferiority complex if you like, but I always buy imported coffee. I know that Natal had a coffee industry, and up in the Transvaal lowveld the coffee bushes are growing row on row. But I buy Costa Rica, Colombia and Blue Mountain.

Coffee may be South Africa's favourite beverage nowadays, yet when you consult the works of old travellers who called at the Cape you discover a settlement of tea-drinkers. Simon van der Stel gave tea parties. More than two centuries ago Mentzel wrote: "Not only the women, but the men drink great quantities of tea throughout the day and sometimes quite late at night." He said that tea was also "a

refreshment for the farmers and a tonic for the slaves."

Apparently the swing to coffee occurred in the nineteenth century, when Afrikaners and British settlers trekked away from the coast and were unable to obtain tea. They eked out their coffee beans with burnt mealies and other substitutes, and finally turn to coffee even when tea again became available.

After my breakfast coffee, my poached egg and bacon, I must have toast and honey. I could not have imported honey even if I wanted it, for there is a complete ban, designed to keep bee diseases out of the country. So there is no aromatic Hymettus honey from

Greece for me; no exotic rosemary honey from Spain. Nevertheless, the bees of South Africa bring in many flavours, with gum blossom in the lead. Pink aloes of the Transvaal bushveld also provide tons of honey, but never enough for the market. Thousands of people are firmly convinced that honey is the secret of reaching the century mark, and so the demand is always greater than the supply.

Cape Town has been a curry and rice town ever since the Malay slaves arrived in sufficient numbers to superimpose their oriental spice dishes on the solid Dutch cookery.

It took some time. The early Dutch settlers had come from a land of plenty, with a rich, established

cuisine. They looked round for substitutes and prepared them in the Dutch way. Only the high officials could expect delicacies from Holland such as the Edam cheeses which Van Riebeeck enjoyed.

For decades there would be the traditional soup and dumplings, snoek grilled on a spit, beef with peas and salad. However, in those days before baked potatoes were served with roasts, the Nederlanders were already eating rice with their lamb. It was a custom they had brought with them, though the increasing use of rice was due to the oriental influence.

Batavia entered the Cape kitchens, and when Mentzel observed the scene in the middle of the eighteenth century the aroma of curry was unmistakable. Mentzel, by the way, did not know the difference between a Chinese and a Malay, so beware of this confusing error when you read his interesting descriptions.

Mentzel said the Chinese deported from Batavia were able to fend for themselves, as they were expert fishermen and good cooks. "Fried and pickled fish is favoured by soldiers, sailors and slaves," he remarked. "When the fierce north-westerners blow, crayfish, crabs and *granelen* (soft-shell crabs) are cast ashore. They are zealously gathered by these Orientals, cooked and

sold. The Chinese are the only candle-makers at the Cape. These Asiatics likewise keep small eating-houses where tea and coffee is always to be had. They specialise in the making of *kerrikerri*.

"One need not be squeamish in patronising their cookshops, since they keep the places scrupulously clean and do not touch the food with their fingers. When they themselves feed, they cut the meat or fish into small slices and put the food in their mouths with chopsticks of white wood or ivory."

Chopsticks have disappeared entirely, and the modern Malay prefers a spoon.

Do you know why curry has such a pleasant grip on those who live in

hot climates? I used to think it was because of a cooling effect, but this is wrong. Curry, the spices used in the hundreds of varieties of curry had a preservative action on fish or meat which was most valuable in the days before refrigerators. Ginger and turmeric and other curry ingredients still make it possible for millions of poor people to enjoy their food in temperatures that spoil fresh meat within a few hours. Curry, like other stews, will taste as good or better the day after it has been made.

Cape Town and Durban can produce curries equal to those offered by many a restaurant in India. I am a fairly recent convert to curry and rice; nevertheless, when I was in the East between the wars, I enjoyed the

world-famous prawn curry at the Galle Face, Colombo, and burned my mouth in Madras.

The finest curry of my life was a chicken curry made in London. I was the guest of Sir William Steward, M.P., who is regarded as the world's leading authority on curry. He has made a hobby of food since his childhood; and he toured India on four different occasions, striving to secure from hundreds of Indian cooks the inner secrets of their curry powders. In the end, Sir William was able to make a finer curry in London than any curry ever served in India.

Sir William told me that he used twelve different spices, but the details remain in his secret notebook. Two of these spices are not to be

found in ordinary lists. However, he is in favour of simplicity once the curry powder or sauce has been mixed.

There is no real need for the enormous trays of side dishes which some clubs and restaurants place before you. Bombay Duck (a dried fish with a pungent odour) does help to bring out certain flavours. Chutney is essential, and most connoisseurs prefer mango chutney. A mound of rice is enough; the poppadums and chappatis only add to the bulk. Assorted sambals, the salads of the orient, add a pretty touch, but sliced tomatoes serve the same purpose. Scraped coconut certainly adds to the authentic oriental flavour. But the huge array of dishes making up a “ten boy”

curry – because of the number of waiters required to serve it – this is too ostentatious for the quiet curry lover.

Curry at the Cape is seldom the exact counterpart of the oriental biryani, pulaos, tandooris and kebabs. Recipes have changed through the centuries. Hildagonda Duckitt, the “Cape Mrs. Beeton” of seventy years ago, included six curries in her famous recipe book. She did a curried cucumber, stuffed with minced mutton, which appears to be unknown in the East. Her fish curry called *penang*, however, sounds as though it came from Malaya.

Mrs. E. J. Dijkman, a later expert, added dried apricots, pinch of

tartaric acid and a small bunch of lemon leaves to her meat curry. I think the dried fruit is essentially a Cape contribution to this eastern dish.

Many a visitor has mistaken a Cape crawfish curry for chicken. When very small crawfish are used (the sort we are not allowed to catch) the dish is equal to a fine prawn curry.

Pickled fish is another traditional Cape curry with a local origin. Vinegar, curry powder, cornflour, sugar and salt, thinly-sliced onions and bay leaves are cooked for a short period with fried fish. (*Kabeljou* and *geelbek* are about the best). This must stand for some

days before it is eaten. It will keep for months in a proper jar.

Curried beans, an old Malay dish which includes other things (onions and chillies, green ginger and garlic) is available at Cape Town delicatessen counters nowadays. Sosties, those delectable pieces of marinated mutton skewered with onion, are also sold ready for the grill.

Bobotie, the baked curry usually regarded as typical of the Cape, like Table Mountain, is really a foreigner. Dr. Leipoldt discovered a bobotie recipe in a Roman manuscript written in 300 A.D. by one Apicius; and a two hundred year old cookery book called *Traditional Fare of England and Wales*



mentions bobotie by that very name. Fish bobotie, on the other hand, may be a true Cape invention.

Leipoldt had an extremely hearty appetite, but I had known him for years before I made this discovery. Then came a lunch in the Groot Constantia wine cellar, in honour of visiting Members of Parliament from Britain. Food and wine were of the very best that day. I sat next to Leipoldt, saw his gargantuan helpings, and listened with deep respect, as always, to his views on the pleasures of the table.

Curry ranks among the healthy dishes. Leipoldt insisted on slow cooking to allow the many flavours to be taken up by the dish as a

whole. (“A stew boiled is a stew spoiled”). Curry powder had to be added in just the right measure. He said the various spices aided digestion and the general health.

Ginger is not only a preservative but an old treatment for colds. Tamarind leaves cure a husky throat. Turmeric and coriander put an end to flatulence. Cinnamon is a germicide. Aniseed and horseradish give you an appetite. Cardamom, the ancient “seeds of paradise”, is a harmless stimulant. Nutmeg aids the digestion. So you can run down the list of sweet and seductive spices, finding some virtue in each one,

Leipoldt used to speak almost in ecstasy of the mutton curry, with

fried eggs, bananas and preserved tangerines, served at the White House Hotel in Haylett's time. The curry paste recipe, he recalled, had been brought from the island of Ternate by a Malay slave cook, and written down when Van Imhoff was governor. Where is that recipe now?

Many a Malay home in Cape Town has a mortar or a small handmill. kept specially for grinding the curry powder ingredients. The familiar scene all over India, with millions pounding their spices on the pavements, is unknown here.

Leipoldt favoured a renowned curry powder made for well over a century by the old Cape Town grocery firm which gave its name

to Cartwright's Corner. I tried to discover the origin of this secret preparation; but such valuable secrets are well guarded. My old friend and newspaper colleague, A. P. Cartwright, was under the impression that his grandfather, a world traveller, had brought back the recipe from India. However, the old-fashioned yellow packet states that it is prepared "after Jacob Watermeyer's celebrated recipe." And who was Jacob Watermeyer? Two centuries ago the first Watermeyer arrived, and I have been unable to trace one who mastered the art of blending spices. The Cartwright firm opened its first shop in Strand Street in 1836, and the curry powder was on sale long before the firm moved into

Adderley Street and built the corner property crowned by a domed turret.

The makers of Cartwright's curry powder suggest that the cook may add a little mixed spice, mace, cinnamon, allspice or chilli powder to vary the old recipe. But remember, whatever ingredients are added to flavour your curry, they must be so well blended that no individual flavour predominates in the finished dish.

Among the curries given in Cartwright's booklets (some of which are rare Africana items nowadays) are recipes supplied by Leipoldt, Jeanette van Duyn and winners in a national curry contest. Recipes include curried beetroot,

soup, the highly popular curry fricadels, curried crab, pumpkin curry, mushroom curry and curried eggplant.

What do you drink with curry? I find that even a mild curry is too spicy to give wine a chance. Some curry eaters, however, declare that a Cape dessert wine, such as sweet muscadel, blends satisfactorily with curry. Leipoldt preferred the sauterne types. He remembered old Cape families serving wines such as Madeira, amontillado and jerepigo with curry. Recently I have heard vin rose mentioned. Fond as I am of wine, I shall remain faithful to stout when the steaming curry and rice appears on the table.

You will need chutney with your curry. I always wander through the home industries section of the Cape Show to examine the many chutneys, *atjars* and *blatjangs* set out there. All these curry accompaniments came originally from the East, but the recipes have been modified to suit the local ingredients.

*Atjar* is usually a mild chutney composed of mangoes or lemons, onions or cauliflower. *Blatjang* is hotter, and made of dates or other fruit. The modern Cape Malay sambal is a cool salad eaten with curry; but a strong condiment which included red pepper used to be known as a *sambal*. Lichtenstein, writing a century and a half ago, declared: "*Sambal* is a

mixture of gherkins cut small, onions, anchovies, cayenne pepper and vinegar."

Hildagonda Duckitt made a Cape chutney with apricot jam, salt, cayenne, pounded ginger, sour apples and onions. Another of her chutney recipes embodied dried fruit, red chillies, onions, ginger, salt and garlic. I once tasted a banana chutney in Paarl, and felt that the mango had encountered a serious rival.

Another secret recipe in the vast curry field is known as Mrs. Ball's chutney. This came to the Cape from the United States in rather an unusual way. Mrs. Ball's father was Captain Adkins, master of the S.S. *Quanza*, and he took his wife to sea

with him. His wife had inherited the chutney recipe from her mother, who had first bottled it about one hundred and twenty years ago.

The *Quanza* was wrecked at East London with six other ships during a south-east gale in 1872. All on board were saved, and Mrs. Ball's mother had the presence of mind to save the chutney recipe. Captain and Mrs. Adkins decided to settle in King William's Town; there a daughter Amelia was born, and she inherited the chutney recipe.

Amelia became Mrs. Ball. She moved to Cape Town, and during World War I she decided to bottle the chutney on a commercial scale. She passed on the secret to her sons and grandson. When she died in

1962 at the age of ninety-seven, "Mrs. Ball's chutney" had long been famous all over Southern Africa. The secret recipe was certainly the most valuable item saved from that shipwreck long ago.

In several previous works I have paid tribute to various Mrs. Beeton's of the Cape who have preserved the old recipes in their cookery books. Let me add a few more names to those who show us how to make use of the wealth of food on land and in the Cape seas.

Miss Edith Stephens of Rondebosch, distinguished botanist and author of two books on Cape fungi, included many mushroom recipes in her book on the edible

species. I am sure Miss Stephens saved many lives by writing to the Cape Town newspapers every year when the first poisonous fungi appeared, and telling everyone in simple language how to identify them.

Apart from these services, Miss Stephens received hundreds of visitors at her home, examined their baskets, and told them what they had been gathering. One woman went to Miss Stephens, almost as an afterthought, and remarked: "I'm sure these mushrooms are all right – I'm cooking them for my family's supper tonight. But I just thought you might like to see them." There was not an edible mushroom in the whole basket. They were death cups, every one of

them; and the whole family would probably have been wiped out.

Once I bought some mushrooms at a stall on the Parade. I could not identify the species myself, so I went through the colour-plates in both works by Miss Stephens. My mushrooms were not there. These mushrooms were larger and sturdier than the field mushroom, and the absence of healthy pink colouring disturbed me. So instead of taking them to the kitchen I sent them to Miss Stephens. They were edible mushrooms of a species hitherto unknown to the experts.

Miss Stephens once spoke to me of two staple foods of her childhood in Cape Town which seemed to have vanished. (She mentioned

1884 as the first year she could remember). One favourite in her family of eleven was Australian tinned rabbit, which made a nice economical pie. There was also Australian tinned butter, which the grocer dug out of a huge container and put into little “butter-boat” carriers.

Another authority whose work has given me great help and pleasure is Mrs. Aagot Strömsöe, probably the leading authority on fish cookery. She brought the basic experience with her in 1904 from Norway, the home of this particular skill. But she had been in the Cape for nearly a quarter of a century before she wrote her fish classic: *Do You Know How to Cook Fish?* Like

many valuable cookery books, this one is hard to find nowadays.

Mrs. Strömsöe has the Norwegian knack of making anchovies from pilchards, and her sun-dried snoek would pass as smoked salmon. “Eating is a pleasant occupation,” says Mrs. Strömsöe. “People who are not interested in good food are probably not greatly interested in anything, and are often very dull people.”

My third authority on food is my old friend and colleague Hastings Beck, author of *Meet the Cape Food* and *Meet the Cape Wine*. Beck brings a legal mind to bear on the well-spread table, for he was an advocate before he became a writer. Beck agrees with Mrs.

Strömsöe about interest in food, though he puts it differently: “A lively interest in what is put on the table is the best digestive. It is the gourmand and not the gourmet who is likely to suffer from dyspepsia.”

In the days before the penguin egg became almost as rare as a dodo egg, I used to follow Beck’s recipe. Boil your penguin egg for twenty minutes, remove the hard, burning hot shell, then beat up the egg in a tumbler with butter, pepper and salt. This gives you a blend of white and yolk which is like a soufflé.

Leipoldt, by the way, always declared that penguin eggs were at their best when boiled in sea water. I believe he was right. In my

sailing days we always boiled our potatoes in sea water, and the flavour was excellent.

Some of the Cape families who have clung to their homes through the centuries have cooks whose great-grandfathers were slaves on the same estates. These old *aias* (from the Portuguese word *aya*) are treated with great respect. They carry the old Cape cuisine in their heads, from *frikkadel* and *sosaties* to *geelrys* and *doekpoeding*. They can bake *mosbolletjies* and *boerebeskuit*, *roosterkoek* and *pampoenkoekies*.

There is a true story of the head of a Cape family who gave his coloured cook a motor-car as a reward for years of skilful work. I have also heard of a family on the



False Bay coast who had the same cook Dina for more than sixty years. She was buried in the family plot. Another family in the district had a maid named Julie who lived to ninety and who had started to help in the kitchen at the age of ten. She never left that family during her eighty years of service.

My old friend Andre Steytler has told me of a coloured cook named Mina who served five generations of his family. Mina lived over the coach-house at Mouille Point with her husband and six children. Often she cooked for about twenty people. She saw the carriage and horses go, and the motor-car that took their place. She lived through three wars and the influenza of 1918, and reached the age of

ninety. Although she had been pensioned long before that, she often came back to work of her own accord, talking happily of the old days as she shelled the peas.

Cape cooking has a fine tradition, noble as the thatched homesteads and historic farms where the aromas of spices mingle with the scents of wine cellars and orchards.



## Chapter Ten

### THE WINE I LIKE

*Who loves not women, wine  
and song,  
He lives a fool his whole life  
long.*

MARTIN LUTHER

MARCH in the Cape, thousands upon thousands of grape baskets are coming out of the vineyards and going into the tanks for pressing. Grapes with romantic names and fine juices, hermitage

and shiraz, riesling and pontac, stein and clairette blanche.

Once in my life I saw the old-fashioned *parstyd*, the pressing of the grapes by foot. That was when I was a small boy, staying with my mother on the Kriel farm at the end of French Hoek valley before World War I. They threw the grapes into *trapbalies* and bare legged boys and girls marched happily round the vats, joking and singing, until the juice was ready to be poured into the fermenting tub.

One or two conservative farmers cling to this method.

They say that the machines which crush pips and stalks with the grapes never produce as good a

wine as the soft human feet. I doubt whether the wine does suffer, though it is a fact that wood is friendly towards wine and metal is an enemy. Certainly the parstyd has lost something of its charm now that the music has died away under the noise of the *égrappoir*.

This is a vast and fascinating business, the Cape wine industry, and one which comparatively few South Africans understand. Most people seem to be frightened by the very name wine, and I think the reason is obvious. It is the fault of people in the trade who turned a simple thing into a mysterious ritual.

Look at this wine merchant's brochure, all in glorious

technicolour. He tells the nervous, ignorant host and hostess just how to entertain with wine; a fantastic rigmarole that no sensible person would think of following. It goes like this:

Start with sherry, which must be served in a narrow *copita* glass that you can hardly get your nose into. Sherry appears before the meal, and accompanies the hors d'oeuvres or soup. Fair enough, except for the glass.

Bring in the fish, and serve a white wine – with its own special long-stemmed glass, of course. Then you give them an entree, with a claret in a nice round claret glass.

By this time your guests may be wondering how much more there is

to come. The cunning wine merchant has thought all that out. Just a plain, homely roast joint, with a burgundy and, of course, a special glass with an inward curve of the lip so that the bouquet will not be lost.

Nearly over? Certainly not, my friend. You have forgotten the poultry, which comes with champagne in a tulip glass, or the more conventional saucer-shaped bowl.

You and your guests may be reeling by this time, but you must have cheese, with a port-type wine; and your sweets with a full-flavoured dessert wine. Thank heaven for the coffee, and you will then be permitted to have a liqueur,

in the proper thimble glass, or an old brandy in a balloon.

Feel like bursting? I do when I read that sort of literature. Some of my friends might go through that menu without sending for a doctor. I would not dare to attempt it.

However, this is really a very simple business and I propose to keep it simple. You are giving a dinner party. Serve brandy and soda before dinner. Not whisky, because whisky and wine do not mix, whereas brandy is a member of the wine family.

If you have a fish course, give them white wine. Certain iconoclasts have oversimplified the wine procedure in recent years by arguing that there is no possible

harm in serving a light red wine with fish. I tried this, once, and decided I would never do it again. It is true that certain wines and foods blend admirably, just as curry and rice go together, tripe and onions, and other such partners of the table. So we insist on white wine with fish.

Follow with a red wine for the meat – any sort of poultry or butcher's meat. If you are providing only meat, cut out the white wine. Never mind about the glasses; the wine is the thing. I prefer plain, clear glasses, though, so that the colour of the wine may be appreciated to the full.

Do not try to match the sweets or fruit with other wines. After the

white and the red you will have given them enough wine varieties. Any wine goes well with cheese, so finish the red wine and open no more bottles.

Liqueurs? I keep them for my guests, but seldom touch those sweet little drinks myself. A glass of old brandy is another matter. Balloon glasses, by the way, are going out of fashion. You can enjoy the bouquet of old brandy in a small glass, and you do not waste any of the precious stuff on a large area of glass.

Now I will tell you what I have learned about the wines of the Cape since that memorable day in the French Hoek valley when I tasted wine for the first time in my life.

Our finest wines are dry sherries, dry red table wines and certain dessert wines. This emphasis on red wines may come as a shock to those thousands of people who order white table wine almost automatically. Some are under the impression that the white wines are lighter than the red. I can assure you that the difference is so small that it can be detected only with a scientific instrument. You will never notice it.

The wine you like is a good wine. I cannot quarrel with your taste if you order the sweet or slightly-sweet white table wines which head waiters like to recommend and women love. They suit the feminine palate, not mine. In fact, I find them almost repulsive.

Wine trade experts tell me that the Cape will never produce a white wine to be compared with the Rhine wines or the Chablis or Montrachet of France. One authority has pointed out the technical difficulties of making a superb white wine. "It is made or broken within three hours of the crushing of the grapes," he declared. White wine is a prima donna, a temperamental lady indeed.

Soil and climate at the Cape do not impart that elusive character which distinguishes the great white wines of this world. The shorter ripening period has some influence, for the very warm weather seems to prevent the wine reaching perfection.

Nevertheless, it is possible to find palatable Cape white wines. Some of them are greatly overpriced. It is a peculiarity of the Cape wine trade that fine wines are to be found in the middle-price group, while certain highly-priced bottles almost deserve to be classed as rubbish.

Wine prices in South Africa really ought to be investigated and fixed by the government. Some hotel-keepers are so unfriendly that their wine lists carry a wretched selection and at such high prices that diners order beer in despair. It is possible to pay ten shillings or more for a wine which is not worth two shillings. Incidentally, I doubt very much whether any Cape wine is worth ten shillings a quart bottle.

Six shillings should be the top price, even in an hotel.

Hotel-keepers talk about the care they have to lavish on wine and the cost of service. This makes no sense at all. Certainly the white wine must be chilled. Beer also comes out of the refrigerator, but the breweries see to it that you are not robbed for this ordinary, civilised service. Wine is no different from beer and a lot of it should be just as cheap. You pull a cork instead of knocking off the cap.

Probably the most insufferable part of wine drinking in hotels is the waiter who knows nothing of the subject, but who presses upon you some undrinkable bottle. And if you do not stop him, he will pour

out red wine with the fish course. Of course, there is another way of looking at this. Wine service in South African hotels is so slow that you are really lucky to see any wine at all as early in the meal as the fish.

I prefer the restaurants where people bring their own wine. It saves a lot of money, and I make sure of getting my wine when I want it by pulling the cork myself. This is not the way things are done in Paris or London, and I know it. But then, South Africa is still only half-conscious of the industry which started three centuries ago, and which now exports millions of gallons of wine a year.

I saw a peculiar ship a few years ago, a wine tank ship. She was loading nearly a quarter of a million gallons of red and white wines in bulk for France. (Yes, for France; they drink so much wine that their own production never meets the demand. Some of the Breton fishermen drink a gallon of wine a day, which is far too much of a good thing). And where do you think that wine tanker was loading? In Table Bay Docks, of course. This was not distilling wine. It is illegal to distil anything but genuine cognac in France. This was Cape table wine, the *vin ordinaire* of the ordinary Frenchman. They know the Cape wines in France, but in South Africa they remain a mystery. Let me open the cellar



doors, then, and suggest a few wines.

I must put in a good word for White Leipzig. It is nearly thirty years since I visited the Rabie brothers at Leipzig, Nuy, and saw the light railway used to rush the wine grapes from vineyard to cellar during the vintage. Many a bottle of their dry white wine have I enjoyed since then.

Twee Jonge Gezellen, an old farm in the Tulbagh valley, is producing a number of prize-winning dry white wines nowadays. Try their dry rieslings. The riesling grape is among the aristocrats. German connoisseurs have admired these riesling wines, produced in low temperature, air-conditioned cellars

to overcome the heat problem. Twee Jonge Gezellen also supplies the “demi-sec” wines which I serve only when my women friends come to dinner.

Witzenberg, from the same Tulbagh valley, is an oldstager, probably the best-known wine in South Africa in the nineteen-twenties. I still buy Witzenberg in nip bottles, a sound white wine, and the right amount to accompany a sole or crawfish at lunch time.

Riesling wines from Nederburg at Paarl cannot be passed over. This is an old estate with a good old name which has gained a reputation overseas. One of their sweetish table wines is sold by hotels and restaurants in South Africa at a

pound or more a bottle; far more than I am prepared to pay. However, this is a decent wine of its type, which is more than I can say for some of the other high-priced white wines.

Now I come to my favourites, the dry red table wines. People who avoid wine because of acidity, people with stomach ulcers, should try again, choosing red wine instead of white. All over the world, some people find that white wines upset their stomachs. It is also worth remembering that all the superb table wines of the world are red, and that in nearly all wine countries the red wines are superior to the white. This is certainly true of the Cape, and the only great exception to the rule is Germany.

Red wine, as you know, is made from purple grapes, and the noble colour is imparted by the skins. The fermentation is a natural process in which the skins remain with the juice. Separation of skins and juice when a white wine is made is a tricky business; so is temperature control; hence the failure of some white wines.

Owing to ignorance in South Africa, far more white wine is consumed than red. Perhaps that is why the makers of red wine have not bumped up their prices to such high levels as those found in the white group. Mind you, there are some overpriced reds. You can find out their names easily enough. I am very fond of one of them, from the Zonnebloem estate at Simondium;

but I seldom buy it because it has rivals of similar quality at lower prices.

Zonnebloem has been described by a trade paper as “the cream of South African wine and the equal of any in the world”. I dislike extravagant praise, but I must say that the red Zonnebloem is a wine of character which deserves the many prizes it has won.

I have enjoyed the Stellenbosch Farmers’ Winery products for many years. Chateau Libertas is always in my cupboard. This is another wine which may be kept for years, and which improves after a couple of years in your own cellar. London connoisseurs have compared

Chateau Libertas with the French wine of Saint-Emilion.

Nederburg Cabernet is listed among the medium-priced wines, and there is now a more expensive “selected Cabernet” available in pints and quarts. Many tourists from Britain and elsewhere visit the one hundred and seventy year old Nederburg homestead at Paarl and continue to buy the wines when they return home. These estates which use their own names on their labels, and which produce, mature and bottle their own wines, have an advantage and an air of old romance which the wine merchant who fabricates a name cannot hope to achieve.

Your true wine-lover likes to know where his wine comes from, and he dislikes anything savouring of imitation. The customer is always right. However, the problem of naming wines is not always easy. I shall deal with that point later. At the moment we are still feeling the mellow sense of well-being which comes when a sound red wine is accompanied by a tender grilled steak or mature cheese:

Years ago I used to drive out gladly to Muratie, near Stellenbosch, where dear old G. P. Canitz the artist gave some of the finest parties ever held beneath the Simonsberg. We sat down to supper, German sausage with potato salad, under a long vine trellis. And we drank the good

Muratie wines that Canitz made so well. Canitz has gone, but I think of him whenever I drink the Muratie Pinot Noir-Gamay, one of my favourite red wines.

Constantia is a good area for red wines, and I always keep some of the Alphen and High Constantia red wines on my shelves. London wine experts say that Chateau Alphen reminds them of the French district wine of Beaujolais.

Remember the name Pinotage if you want some of the best red wine the Cape can offer. About twenty years ago Professor C. J. Theron and the late Dr. A. I. Perold (two great wine scientists of Elsenburg and Stellenbosch) crossed the Hermitage and Pinot Noir grapes to

produce a new type. After years of painstaking cross-pollination and grafting experiments they created the Pinotage strain. Up to then, all the Cape wine grapes had been grown from imported stock. Pinotage is a Cape product, designed as it were for the soil and climate.

Pinotage wines appeared on the market for the first time a few years ago. They were an immediate success. Try the Lanzerac Pinotage under the right circumstances and you may agree with me that there is no table wine like a dry red wine.

Sparkling wines have never appealed greatly to me, and even in France a great claret such as Chateau Lafite would be my first

choice, with a dry Perrier Jouet coming a very good second.

A cynical friend of mine in the Cape wine trade once advised me to mix any good white wine with soda water, as that would be equal to the finest Cape sparkling wine - and far cheaper. Or you could put the wine in a siphon with a bullet. Most people would not know the difference.

Since then the sparkling wines have improved considerably. I still suspect some of the producers of spending more on the heavy bottles, huge corks and magnificent gold labels than on the wine itself. Nevertheless, I cannot sneer at the Cape sparkling wines provided that they are white and dry. When a

sweet, red explosive mixture appears I can only turn my eyes away.

Nor am I impressed by the rosé wines which have appeared in the Cape cellars in recent years. I suspect them of being neither one thing nor the other, though they are chilled and served as white wines. I believe many of the old wine experts of the Cape share this view and turn up their sensitive noses at these pretty little wines; though they make them, as best they can, to meet a demand.

Women, who usually know nothing about wine, have far too much to say about this important item. They buy the rose wines and the sweet wines, still or sparkling, to suit

their own taste. Some firms have had to change their policies because of this demand and switch production from dry to sweet. I find this trend disturbing. But watch the wine advertising and you will see what I mean. It is aimed at women, the great shoppers.

Often and often have I wished that everyone in South Africa could be as pleasant and intelligent as the people one meets on the Cape wine farms and at the great Paarl headquarters of the wine industry. Wine and civilisation do go together. Wine is a way of life.

I go to the Paarl wine cellars occasionally to restore my faith in human nature, to meet people who know how to live. If you have

never visited the fabulous wine temple of the Co-operative Wine Growers Association, the enormous K.W.V., I would advise you to go. This is something more than the largest group of wine cellars in the world. It is not the area that counts, the twenty-five acres; nor is it the thirty million gallons of wine maturing there. This place has the rich atmosphere of a long-established success. Here is the mellow voice of experience, and it will pay you to listen carefully.

By the way, when I was so scathing about women just now, I was not including Mrs. Zita Mulder of the K.W.V. She is an authority on wines; about the only wine expert of her sex I have ever met. Go to her lectures and wine tastings and ask

her any questions you like. She knows her *soleras* and *criaderas*.

During the morning I met again, after thirty years, the genial Dr. C. J. G. Niehaus. Thirty years ago he and the late Dr. A. I. Perold gave me the first Cape *flor* sherry to taste, and told me the story behind it. Little did I imagine that the nutty dry sherry I drank that day would become a serious rival to the famous Spanish sherries of Jerez de la Frontera. Yes, the brains of South Africa are not all in the gold-mining industry.

I was pleased to find that the veteran Dr. Niehaus confirmed my views on the Cape wines, the excellence of the sherries, the dry red table wines, the dessert wines. "We are working with nature in the production of those

wines," he declared. "One day our dry reds will come to the top, like the sherries. We will show the world."

I cannot leave the K.W.V. without mentioning the brandies which have given me such pleasure over the years. Their ten-year-old brandy is a work of art, worth the twenty shillings a bottle which my wine merchant charges. These brandies are made from French and Green grapes by the copper pot still process. The more expensive brandies are distilled twice. Immature brandy contains the aldehyde and fusel oil which give you a hangover. At a party, if I am not sure of the brandy, I ask for gin, which is a pure drink. At home I have my K.W.V. brandy.

As you know, the K.W.V. wines and brandies are not sold direct to the public. Five thousand wine farmers receive their rations at prices which always make my mouth water. But the ordinary consumer may purchase the good K.W.V. sherries, the port, the dry red burgundy-type wine known as Roodeberg No. 2, and the five and ten year old brandies. I do not intend to advertise any particular wine merchant or bottle-store. In any case, these arrangements are subject to change, and obsolete information is useless. Make your own inquiries and you will find how and where these wines may be bought. Now and again, of course, your farming friends may send you a bottle as a present, and this custom is to be encouraged.



So much has been said about wine in the kitchen that I shall not add to the volume. One discovery I have made, however, is not in many cookery-books. The old experts advised us to soak our buck in vinegar. That gives the pot-roast venison a harsh flavour. Soak it in cheap wine, red or white, and you have a really tender, appetising dish.

Knowing people are always urging the Cape wine producers to put South African names on their labels. In fact, this controversy has now become so boring that I shall not weary you for long. I sympathise to some extent with the producers.

Suppose your ancestors came from France with the Huguenots and gave their farm a grand old French name like La Gratitude or Lanzerac. Why on earth should you change it? The label will show clearly enough that the wine is the produce of South Africa.

Then there are names such as claret, which means "clear," and sherry, derived from the Spanish place-name Jerez. Even the jealous French do not claim a monopoly for claret, and sherry is so different, so anglicised, and so well-understood that it would be almost impossible to sell a sherry under any other name. Champagne and cognac, port and burgundy, are in a different class; they are the, sort of

geographical names which should not be imitated.

I have before me a wine-list of the South African Railways. Their catering department stocks a wide range of Cape wines as a matter of policy, and their prices are fairly reasonable. Study this list and you will find that nearly all the wine names nowadays are Dutch or Afrikaans. There are a few unnecessary French, Italian and German imitations, but the list as a whole is redolent of the Cape vineyards and homesteads.

So I will leave you now to enjoy the wine of your choice. Remember that the real connoisseurs, the men like Dr. Niehaus, laugh quietly at the *mystique* which the wine snobs

have built up round the simple yet delectable bottles of wine. Use a little common-sense. The wine you like is a good wine.

## **Chapter Eleven**

### **LANDMARK OF THE OCEANS**

You might not think of the high places of Table Mountain as a sanctuary for old men, but I know better. Precipices and ledges, crags and traverses keep some climbers going well into the seventies and eighties; and one I knew was ninety. Those old men told me about Table Mountain.

Some of them camped on the mountain at week-ends, others spent years of their lives there. I never met one who regretted it. Table Mountain is the grand landmark of the south, a dark giant with white clouds drifting over its summit. When I smell the tree ferns and the arums in the wet soil of a kloof I am fully alive. Here I

can walk off the sorrows and ailments of civilisation. This is the solitude which is like a benediction.

Someone with a head for figures once told me that you could see ten thousand square miles of land and sea from the top of Table Mountain. I daresay he was right. Certainly you can identify the Cedarberg range one hundred and twenty miles away. And looking down, you realise that the Cape Peninsula was once an island, and that a rise of one hundred feet in the sea level would make it an island again, a spectacular island indeed.

I have seen Everest at dawn; and Rio from the rain forest of the Corcovado; and the Canary isles from the air. This mountain range at the southern end of Africa, this giant

brooding over the southern ocean,  
takes its place beside the mountain  
wonders of the world.

On these heights grow the rare  
flowers that early botanists carried  
back in triumph to Europe. Some  
grow on the mountain and nowhere  
else in the world; proteas and orchids  
that love the clouds. Some rarities  
have become extinct, like the blue  
disa seen by the traveller Thunberg  
for the first and last time. Once there  
was an erica on the summit which  
has not been seen for many years.  
Burchell, the naturalist, used a protea  
as firewood, a species which has not  
grown on the mountain within living  
memory.

Yet in spite of all the hazards, the  
fires and the vandals, Table

Mountain is still the home of one of  
the richest floral areas known to  
science. It is hard to trace the origins  
of these rarities. Botanists think they  
may be relics of a huge continent  
which was swallowed up by the  
ocean when the world was young.

Always there is something in flower  
on the mountain. Even in the hottest  
summer months the red disas bloom  
near the waterfalls and along the  
streams, the famous Pride of Table  
Mountain.

*Here the great disas, hovering  
o'er the springs,  
Gaze with delight upon their  
mirrored wings.*

Mountaineers have cultivated small  
patches of certain plants on the  
summit in the hope of saving rarities

from extinction. In one place the massive oriflammes of barbigera proteas may be seen. Silver trees, once in danger, now appear to be holding their own. Seedlings have been planted. Young trees are thriving on Lion's Head, in Newlands forest and in Orange Kloof.

Watsonias grow in fields on the summit; deep blue agapanthus, crassulas of dazzling scarlet, sundews and salmon-coloured gladioli. Ferns rise high. Platteklip has the *keurboom*, with flowers scented like honey.

Table Mountain has been called the "medicine chest of the poor", and indeed there are plants, shrubs, and bulbs for many ills. For centuries the

wise old herbalists have come down with their sacks bulging.

They brought wild garlic, more pungent than the chef's white bulb, to cure influenza. Wild camomile, with its bright green foliage and white flower, for dyspepsia. Leaves of wild celery, to provide a decoction for rheumatism. *Wildedagga* from Lion's Head, with orange flowers, the nauseous purgative known to the Hottentots. *Renosterbos*, gummy and resinous, to be infused with brandy; a tonic for dyspeptics. Hottentot figs, with antiseptic juice in the fat leaves, a gargle and a lotion. Wild sage with blue flowers and fragrant leaves to be smoked like tobacco for asthma. Kukumakranka, the little bulb with exquisite scent which transforms

brandy into a remedy for pains in the stomach.

Anyone who suffers from the type of corns known as plantar warts will find a remedy on the Table Mountain slopes, the *Cotyledon orbiculata* with white leaves tipped with red. It flowers in summer. Apply the cotyledon leaves, fix them in position, and I am assured that after a time the warts pop out like corks.

One plant I really like is *protea mellifera*, the familiar pink and white sugarbush. When this is in bloom you can shake out the sweet watery liquor that the bees love and drink it for pleasure-or to cure a cough.

Platteklip was the first part of the mountain that I came to know. The flat granite rocks were my

playground as a small boy. I remember the luscious blackberries that grew there. Platteklip was the first of all the many routes up the mountain, the gorge penetrated by the earliest white climber, Antonio de Saldanha, early in the sixteenth century. Leopards were among the dangers in those days. Later the Platteklip Gorge was infested by runaway slaves, and more than one climber was stoned to death.

I knew Platteklip in the days when Malay washerwomen worked there in scores. Long before the wash houses were built, slaves carried Cape Town's laundry on their heads to this stream, and laid the clean clothes on the flat rocks to dry. Many an author recorded the picturesque scene. Lady Duff Gordon wrote a

century ago: “Tomorrow my linen will go to the top of the giant mountain ... and there be scoured in a clear spring by brown women, bleached on the mountain top, and carried back all those long miles on their heads, as it went up”. In fact, her linen went no farther than Platteklip. There the Malays found all they needed without climbing higher than the foot of Platteklip Gorge.

Van Riebeeck issued a *placaat* forbidding the pollution of streams in the settlement, so the Platteklip custom must have started very long ago. One of the sights of Old Cape Town was the long procession of Malay washerwomen, huge bundles on their heads, swinging along up Hope Street and Buitenkant Street

in single file. For many years they used the stream and the rocks provided by nature. Wash-houses were built three quarters of a century ago, with seventy cement wash-tubs and proper ironing facilities; and the women paid three pence a day.

These washhouses were closed only a few years ago. Then the Malay women, each with her *doek* and flowing skirt, came down the cobbled path for the last time. Some were descendants of the slaves who used the Platteklip stream in the eighteenth century. After the abolition of slavery in 1834, there was a celebration at Platteklip on December 1 each year. They finished their work early and danced to the Malay orchestras.

I have already mentioned Mrs. Caleb Keene, the woman camera artist who recorded so many human activities in Cape Town early this century, and who left a wonderful study of two young Malay washerwomen on the slopes at Platteklip. It was reproduced as a postcard, and thousands must have been sold. Now the washerwomen, picturesque as the flower sellers, have almost lost the long contest with the steam laundries.

Generations of climbers were puzzled by the mysterious ruins in the forest where the waters of the Platteklip and Silver Streams join. Old prints show an estate in this area, and a eighteenth century map supplies the name "De Molenaar". Sure enough, there was a mill lower

down, but the separate ruins of a large house remained a deep mystery. It was the highest house in Cape Town.

I found a letter in the *Cape Argus* many years ago from a Miss P. Schipper, who attempted to solve the riddle. She said that her grandmother knew the place in 1863, when the mill was owned by a De Wet and used for making curry powder. De Wet abandoned the mill, handing it over to one Ufkin.

Ufkin (went on Miss Schipper) lived in the house and allowed the Malay washerwomen to store their laundry at two pence a bundle. But the house was haunted by an old slave named Jaftha, who had been



owned by De Wet. Ufkin left, and the next tenant, a coloured man named Harry, cut his throat. The house then became a ruin.

Mr. W. H. Crump and other members of the Mountain Club spent their week-ends for eighteen months cutting down the trees and clearing away the creepers and debris that had covered the mysterious building. Excavations revealed a flight of steps leading to the remains of a house that might have been called a mansion; a house with a terrace, a slate-paved entrance hall, walls of undressed stone, red tiles that had formed the roof, and a kitchen with large open fireplace.

Broken china and clay pipes were found buried. Antique wine bottles of queerly-shaped glass, earthenware which had once held strong liquor, suggested many a merry party on the mountainside.

Mr. Crump then dug with equal perseverance into the archives, and discovered that a mill had been built at Platteklip shortly before the end of the eighteenth century. There were various owners, among them a Petrus de Wet, who ground not only wheat and barley, but curry for the slaves. De Wet thus gained the nickname of Kerriekruie de Wet.

The house which baffled so many climbers was built by the slaves of a wine merchant named Schultz. He

farmed there, and called the place De Grendel van de Platteklip Kloof.

About a century ago the Cape Town municipality bought a number of properties so that it could control the mountain streams. So the mill and the house were sold for four hundred pounds. It seems a reasonable sum for the aroma of curry and the marvellous view of Table Bay. Both the buildings fell into decay. Mr. Crump traced the foundations of the curry mill and found the indestructible millstone.

Men have spent years on the mountain far higher than the Platteklip farm; all sorts of men from rangers to hermits. One man, a retired dental mechanic, spent

eight years in a cave with a view of the Constantia mountains on one hand, Oudekraal on the other. Once a week he went to town for his groceries and books. He found that he found that he could live on one pound a week.

When this hermit tired of reading he watched the dassies, he watched his cat, and he revelled in the sunsets. Washing and mending clothes and collecting firewood occupied some of his time. Sometimes he played the violin. It was noise, the city noise, that drove him up the mountain. When he was nearing sixty his friends persuaded him to move back to the city, and he did so with many regrets.

Now to reopen an old controversy. Lady Anne Barnard's bath is at Platteklip, and the pretty little pool at Kirstenbosch where visitors drop small coins for charity was never used by the amiable hostess of the Castle.

For years I was always rather dubious about Lady Anne bathing anywhere on the mountainside. It was not the custom of her day, though I suppose the slave girls would have warned her of any male approaching the secret pool.

No one could ever explain to me why the Kirstenbosch pool came to be known as Lady Anne Barnard's bath. The authorities certainly did not foster the legend. One day the bath was reported to be leaking,

and an enterprising though none too well-informed plumber rang up Professor Rycroft's office and offered to sell Lady Anne a fine new bath.

The bath at Kirstenbosch stands near the site of the old Kirsten homestead (replaced by the present tea pavilion) and appears to have been built by Kirsten for his own family. It is possible, however, that the bath was designed by Christopher Bird, colonial secretary early last century, for his own use. One historian claimed that the bath was shaped like a bird, a humorous effort on Bird's part. But you can search the extensive Barnard literature without discovering a suggestion that Lady Anne swam in

the Kirstenbosch bath. She lived too far away.

A small oil painting in Mr. William Fehr's collection was exhibited at the Castle in 1956, and then it was noticed that the picture bore two inscriptions. One, in Lady Anne's handwriting, read: "My own bathing place". A nude stands in the pool fed by a mountain stream, but the face is turned away and it may have been anybody. Someone else added the words: "Capel Sluyt, Platteklip Gorge, Table Mountain".

So far as I am concerned, Lady Anne swam at Platteklip. Lucky for her there were no leopards about on the days she chose to visit her own bathing place.

I am no admirer of the Table Mountain cableway, for it has spoilt the grandeur of the table and there was no need for the hideous contraption. A motor road from Constantia Nek would have served the purpose.

Ugliness should be hidden. Table Mountain's first cableway, built in 1894, was placed discreetly in Kasteel's Poort. You can still see one of the pylons there, but it does not disfigure the great facade of the mountain.

This pioneer cableway came about as a result of the great drought of 1880, which started the movement for bringing more water down from the mountain. Councillor John Woodhead was a leading

campaigner, and the cableway transported materials for the Woodhead reservoir on the summit. Influential people and workmen travelled in the skips. Power was supplied by a steam-engine at Bakoven.

Water experts thought the new reservoir would guarantee the city's water supply for all time. How difficult it is to see into the future!

Mr. Woodhead was mayor on that June day in 1894 when the foundation stone of the reservoir was laid. Mayor, councillors, guests and pipers of the Black Watch swayed up the mountainside in the little open cars of the cableway. They were met at the top

by a steam locomotive with a string of decorated trolleys.

When the reservoir was finished there was another celebration on the summit. "A few braved the risks of the aerial flight," wrote a reporter (referring, of course, to the cableway), "but the greater number went round by Constantia Nek, where horses carried the visitors up along the bridle path. By noon almost everyone had reached the reservoir in disagreeable fog which shut off the glorious view."

So the little railway engine remains on the lonely Table Mountain plateau as a relic of the busy days when a camp full of masons and labourers flourished for months on the summit. For years the engine

hailed the trucks filled with stone from the Kasteel's Poort quarry to the reservoir site. It was also used during the Hely-Hutchinson reservoir construction. Then the line was pulled up and the engine was driven into its shed for the last time and abandoned. No one has raised steam for half a century. It will never move again.

Small cars have been driven along the Constantia Nek route to the mountain top, and my friend A. P. Cartwright accompanied the pioneer, a Baby Austin. That was in 1929, and the expedition was organised by Mr. R. F. Jones to prove that a motor-road was feasible.

The car was lightened by removing doors, cushions, mudguards and windscreens. Then the skeleton was loaded with planks, ropes, spades, hammers, spare petrol and water. Mrs. Jones and a party of journalists and photographers trudged alongside, pushing and pulling the car through the bush and along the zig-zag path.

They started at six-thirty in the morning and by noon they were two thousand feet above sea level. Often there was a drop of five hundred feet close to the wheels. Only when they neared the ranger's house was the driver able to open up and race along at ten miles an hour. They reached the house soon after five in the afternoon.

It was an achievement that no one wished to repeat, and the car was dismantled and brought down in parts. In recent years, however, the jeep has made faster and easier journeys possible.

A feat which few remember was one which Mr. Sidney Jarman performed in February 1937. At the age of seventy-two he cycled from Constantia Nek to Maclear's Beacon, the highest point of the mountain. This was an impromptu effort. Mr. Jarman had previously cycled round South Africa, more than three thousand miles in two months. He was exploring without any set plan when he saw a footpath through the forests and followed it. He reached the ranger's house before nightfall and returned the following day.

Fifteen hundred feet up on Devil's Peak there is a memorial to another member of the Jarman family. He was Frank Jarman, a forester who entered the service in 1884; and if you go to the cottage he built close to the King's Blockhouse, overlooking Groote Schuur, you will find the plaque:

“In memory of Forester Frank Jarman who from 1893 to 1902 had charge of the forest work which covered this wind-swept mountain with trees.

“He left here for similar work on the mountains opposite, and died as the result of an accident.

“On the wall of this house, which he built and in which he

lived, this tablet is placed by his brother officials of the Forest Department and by friends as a record of his sterling qualities and of his remarkable success as a forester.

“He found these barren, stony slopes treeless; he left them covered with forest.

“November 1904.”

Jarman started at Tokai. In the eighties of last century there was a strong contrast on the mountain, the suburban side being heavily wooded while the town side had been left a bushy waste. Nine years after Jarman joined the department he was stationed on Devil’s Peak to restore the balance.

His first and most devastating experience was the fire of 1894, one of the great Table Mountain fires of all time. At two in the hot afternoon of January the tenth, smoke was reported. (Conditions seem to have been similar to the Christmas Day fire of 1935, which so many still remember). Everything was as dry as a skeleton in the desert. A fierce south-easter spread the flames. Very soon Cape Town was covered with smoke, people in the streets were coughing, the sun was hidden.

Some people abandoned their homes. Mr. Cairncross, the city engineer, asked the army for help. Mr. Hayne, the Burg Street fire superintendent, took the dramatic step of ringing the alarm bell



constantly until a crowd had gathered; then he called for volunteers, offering a shilling an hour. Firemen, police, gunners, military engineers and volunteers were equipped with axes and shovels, and this hastily-organised brigade set out for the mountain.

A sudden change in the wind saved Cape Town that night. It turned the flames towards Platteklip, and the fire burnt itself out when it reached the bare rock. Two white men were suspected of starting this fire deliberately. They were seen by Jarman, but he was unable to leave his post to arrest them.

Another fire broke out in Kasteel's Poort three weeks later, raging for two days and nights. To add to the

anxiety, a powder magazine and factory lay in the path of the fire. Possibly it would not have blown Camp's Bay sky high even if it had caught alight, but it caused something like a panic until the fire fighters beat out the flames.

Such was the scene just after Frank Jarman started his enormous task. Cape Town people had known what it felt like to have their lungs filled with smoke, their eyes reddened, their houses littered with ash. On the face of the mountain ugly scars stood out.

Some forestry experts thought it would be impossible to establish trees in that poor soil, exposed to high winds. Jarman and his convict helpers succeeded. Of course he

planted the exotic pines and eucalyptus which look so inferior to the indigenous trees, but which are so much easier to establish. Apparently the old forests of yellow-wood and ironwood are something the country cannot afford.

Jarman died in a gun accident. Other foresters have lived for sixty years in the lonely stone cottage Jarman built, with the stupendous view of Table Bay on the left, False Bay on the right.

Sometimes there are sixty mountain fires, large and small, in one year for the forester and his men to tackle. And just above the house are the guns and the fort where red-coated soldiers once stood on guard in case an enemy entered Table Bay.

Rangers and their wives have lived on Table Mountain throughout the past eighty years, and babies have been born on the summit. The first was Heinrich Diederich Herbst, born on April 23, 1892. Sir Henry Loch, governor of the Cape, a keen mountaineer, visited the cottage to see the baby. Mrs. Thorsen, also a ranger's wife, bore a son on the mountain in 1907, and this child was named Tafelberg.



## **Chapter Twelve**

### **ANIMALS ON THE DOORSTEP**

NOT many cities in this world can lay claim to the variety of wild life on their very doorsteps that Cape Town still possesses. Nairobi is the only rival that comes to mind immediately.

It is Table Mountain, of course, which has provided the sanctuary. Although the large animals departed long ago, even now there are fifty species of mammals in the Cape

Peninsula, and more than one hundred and fifty species of birds. Snakes, lizards and tortoises sun themselves in the remote places as they have always done.

I have a valuable Cape Peninsula guide compiled by a team of university professors and lecturers. The book states that lions were known on the Table Mountain slopes in 1800, and the last one was shot shortly after the English arrived; but this I simply cannot accept. The last lion must have retreated across the Cape Flats early in the eighteenth century.

Hyenas were killed on Table Mountain a hundred years ago. Farmers trapped them in Constantia. Black-backed jackals

have never become extinct, and poultry farmers still hear the “wuff wuff” of these raiders.

Leopards departed from Table Mountain before World War I, but a small relative, the lynx or *rooikat* has managed to survive. A male lynx may kill twenty sheep in a night, or fifty young buck in a week. Thus the authorities faced a serious problem when a lynx was identified, in October 1961, within the Cape Point game reserve.

Some experts pleaded for preservation, others were in favour of a lynx hunt. The sly lynx settled the matter by vanishing from Cape Point.

Months afterwards, however, the pointed ears of this lynx, or another

of the tribe, were seen near Olifantsbos on the west coast of the reserve. Crunched bones of young buck were found not far away. Apparently the lynx had also thinned out the coveys of pheasants in the neighbourhood.

A lynx was run over by a car above Newlands a few years ago when the new Union Avenue was opened.

Grey wild-cats, about twice the size of your pet domestic cat, are common on the outskirts of Cape Town, but seldom do they show themselves. A newspaper report headed “Strange Cat at Sea Point” (in November 1961) obviously referred to the wild species, *Felis ocreata caffra*. This specimen was seen by a man walking on the

Lion's Head slopes. His dog growled and the cat bounded away into a cluster of pine-trees. Wild-cats are great raiders of fowl runs, and there you will hear them snarl if you come between them and their prey.

Undoubtedly the most common mammal on the mountain is the dassie, that tiny relative of the elephant and rhinoceros. Between the wars a man named Jan Wilson made a living by trapping dassies on the mountain summit. This sort of hunt calls for no great cunning. You close the holes while the lazy dassies are lying in the sun and round up the dassies with the aid of a dog. Wilson also used a trap baited with cabbage leaves. He lived in a lonely hut and spent his

evenings curing the dassie pelts and making karosses.

Cape hares live on the heights. Early this century hunters could usually rely on bagging two or three hares on the Signal Hill slopes; but in recent years they have chosen more remote warrens.

Buck were shot not far from the Wessels family vault on Signal Hill in the eighteen-nineties. They still revisit their old haunts occasionally. Grysbok have wandered into Clifton gardens since World War II, and a grysbok ewe was found by a motorist on Ocean View Drive at Green Point only a few years ago. The doe was taken to the Jonkershoek nature reserve and freed there.

Vaal rhebok are among the antelope that survive in the Peninsula. I came by chance on a report of a fine rhebok that ran wild on Green Point Common about a century ago, and escaped from a pack of deerhounds. That is a sight which will not be seen in our time. However, you may see the rhebok grazing peacefully near Cape Point.

I believe the klipspringers died out in the Cape Peninsula about thirty years ago. Those who remember them leaping from ledge to ledge on the Table Mountain precipices will regret their passing. They were shy and rarely seen, but their shyness did not save them.

It seems that the burrowing mammals stand a much better

chance. Porcupines come out at night, and they were still being hunted on Lion's Head fifty years ago.

Leeuwenhof, the Administrator's residence in the Gardens, has attracted several porcupines in recent years. They cleared out a bed of potatoes in a night and damaged prize gladioli and watsonias. It is easy to see where porcupines have been at work, for they leave their quills as visiting cards. Funnel shaped traps of wire netting often solve the problem, and then the porcupine is pot-roasted. It tastes like young turkey.

I feel bound to place the *erdvark*, the enigmatic antbear, among the Cape Peninsula mammals. A skull in the museum came from the Cape

Flats, and this grotesque creature has been reported from that wild dune area in recent years. The *erdvark* (often spelt “aardvark”) is worth studying because it has completely baffled the zoologists. “The veil over the origin of this animal cannot be lifted,” declared Lydekker, the classification expert. It is unlike any other mammal.

Peter Kolben, the astronomer who worked at the Cape early in the eighteenth century, gave the first description of the *erdvark*. He thought it looked like the red domestic pigs of Europe, but this is a poor comparison. However, the flesh does taste like pork and the general shape is pig-like.

Kolben noted the long tongue and pointed snout. “It lives in the earth, where it digs itself a burrow with great rapidity,” he said. “Once its head and feet are in the earth, it takes such a firm grip that the strongest man cannot tear it loose. If it is hungry it goes in search of an ant heap. When it has found this treasure it looks round in all directions to make sure that everything is quiet and no danger threatens. After this it lies down and stretches its tongue as far as it can. Ants crawl on to it in heaps, and as soon as there are enough it draws its tongue back and swallows all. It does this until fully fed.”

One little error may be noted. The antbear eats termites (often called

“white ants”) which differ considerably from ants.

The *erdvark* has peculiar rootless teeth, and these have been closely examined in the hope of linking up this mammal with some other species. However, the mystery has not yet been solved. It seems to be an ancient creature which has always burrowed in Africa, and which has outlived its contemporaries by millions of years. Ice Age ant bears have been excavated in Madagascar.

Some years ago I gave publicity to an appeal for a complete antbear skeleton. It was required by a museum. Such specimens are rare, though ant bears cannot be regarded as rare animals. The appeal was successful. Nevertheless, few

museums in South Africa possess complete skeletons.

Ant bears are harmless, but their holes may be dangerous. Farm labourers crawl into these burrows in search of honey. Some have become wedged, and have died lingering deaths. I remember one such tragedy in the Hopefield district.

Blue wildebees roamed the Cape Peninsula thousands of years ago, but they had all migrated when Van Riebeeck arrived. A pair of blue wildebees were released in the Cape Point reserve a few years ago, thus restoring a little of the wild life which was once so abundant. Some people with long memories were dubious about this



experiment. They recalled the man who was gored to death by a wildebees while gathering mushrooms on the Rhodes Estate early this century. A native employed on the estate saved the man's companion, and Cecil Rhodes rewarded him with a gift of fifty sovereigns. But the wildebees that Rhodes introduced were black wildebees, which are sometimes ferocious. Blue wildebees behave much better.

Zoologists have found the Cape Point reserve one of the most convenient areas in Africa for studying baboons. There the baboon language has been recorded in all its nuances of grunt and cough, bark and gurgle.

Baboon diet has been listed after careful examination of droppings. (Those seaside baboons like sea food, including crab). One discovery was made when a scientist watched a baboon eating a scorpion. According to legend, the baboon always removes the sting from the luscious tail. In fact, the baboon ate the whole tail.

Professor K. R. L. Hall, a psychologist who spent weeks as a baboon-watcher in the reserve, found evidence of a leadership system among the baboons. But he doubted whether baboons posted special sentries as described by innumerable farmers. Any baboon might bark a warning.

How do baboons compare in intelligence with such crafty members of the family as the chimpanzee? Professor Hall is inclined to give the baboon high marks. A young baboon had been taught to use tools to secure food. And at Cape Point a baboon opened the door of the professor's car, pulled down the flaps of the dashboard compartments, grasped a jar of barley sugar, unscrewed the cover and secured the sweets.

Professor Hall queries the old belief that baboon troops are hostile. Troops at Cape Point shared a small area on a koppie at night without fighting. He found no evidence that baboons threw stones at human beings or attacked them without provocation. Only the baboons

raiding cars for food were liable to bite anyone who interfered with their activities.

A pet baboon, which had lived with a family in the Northern Transvaal for about four years, was released by Professor Hall near a troop of Cape Point baboons. It was attacked by a large male, but was not seriously hurt. The professor watched the tame baboon for days, saw that it was being accepted by the troop, and observed that it was following the feeding habits of the other baboons. Bulbs and leaves, shellfish and crabs replaced the fruit and bread it had eaten in captivity.

The baboons of the Cape Peninsula migrate at uncertain intervals, and in recent years they have been seen on

the face of Table Mountain. One pack, at least one hundred strong, approached the Tafelberg Road above Woodstock not long ago. It is believed that they change their haunts to avoid cold north winds, moving from Tokai in August to rob the fig trees in the warm Hout Bay valley.

King of more than one hundred and fifty species of Cape Peninsula birds, I should say, is the black eagle or *dassievanger*. Once the huge bearded *lammergeier* nested in the southern mountains; and as recently as 1925 a pair of *lammervangers* were living on Table Mountain. They took the tame Groote Schuur guineafowl in their talons, and paid for this meat with their lives.

The black eagle is a powerful creature with a wingspread of six or even seven feet. Only a white band on the back relieves the jet-black feathers. Mountaineers have seen this eagle sweeping down on young klipspringers and carrying them off to its nest of sticks and green leaves on some high ledge. If the buck is large, the black eagle will take it unawares, dash it over the edge of a precipice with a strong wing blow, and swing down to feast on the remains.

Small baboons are also among the black eagle's victims, and dassies are easy prey. Doomed male dassies have been seen fighting desperately and even maiming the great bird; but the eagle always wins. When the black eagle soars

away with a heavy, struggling dassie it may relax its hold and allow the dassie to meet its death on the rocks.

Not within living memory, I imagine, has there been quail shooting on Green Point Common. Yet the game birds have not all abandoned the Cape Peninsula. Coveys of shrill greywing partridge fly round Table Mountain and the more remote parts of the peninsula, and these tasty birds are often snared by poachers. You may also see the little Namaqua sand grouse drinking round the vleis before sundown.

Turtle doves are the most common garden birds of the peninsula. Butcher birds, robins, European

starlings, Cape sparrows and wagtails are others that every gardener knows.

Among the larger birds of the suburbs are the dikkops. "Peep-peep-peep," they cry, often when people would prefer them to remain silent.

Cape Town's favourite bird is the piet-my-vrou, a cuckoo which has become famous not for its plumage or its habits (which are reprehensible) but for its call. Spring is not regarded as a fact in the Cape Peninsula until someone has written to the newspapers claiming to have heard the first piet-my-vrou, known to ornithologists as *Cuculus solitarius*.

Listen carefully, and you will find that the sound is really “whit, whit, wheeuu”. But the piet-my-vrou is a bird of legend. One cannot be entirely realistic in the presence of a shattered romance.

I have traced the name back for nearly two centuries, to the French traveller Le Vaillant. He engaged a Hottentot named Piet for his first journey, and this man collected birds. One day Piet returned to camp with an interesting bird, black and orange, the female of the species. Le Vaillant told Piet he would like to have the male.

Piet was reluctant. He was a superstitious trapper, and he declared that if he touched the male bird it would bring him bad luck. It

seems that when he had killed the female, the mate followed him angrily, crying: “*Piet my vrou! Piet my vrou!*”

Such was Le Vaillant’s story. He may have invented it, or embroidered a legend already well known at the Cape. Another and later version tells of a villainous Hottentot named Piet who murdered a man so that he could take the man’s wife. But the soul of the victim entered into the bird, and wherever the murderer went the bird called “*Piet-my-vrou!*”

*Piet-my-vrou*, the red-chested cuckoo, is heard far more often than it is seen. It is common enough, and about twelve inches in length. But it lives alone, as the

Latin name suggests, and keeps to thick bush and well-covered trees. The *piet-my-vrou* flies swiftly and takes cover as soon as possible.

For this reason little is known of its habits, apart from its outrageous behaviour in the nests of other birds. No female *piet-my-vrou* would ever dream of building a nest. Often a robin nest is selected and the chocolate or olive coloured egg is left there. The mother takes no further interest.

Once the *piet-my-vrou* has been hatched, it becomes a greedy monster. Fed by the unsuspecting foster parents, it finds the strength to kick out all legitimate eggs or fledglings. By the time it is ready to fly the young *piet-my-vrou* is

about three times the size of its foster mother.

Possibly the *Cuculus solitarius* is the loneliest and most unsociable bird in the world. Knowing no real parents, it grows up with instinct as its guide. Alone it discovers the migration route over Africa, and the areas in South Africa which will provide the hairy caterpillars which it loves.

Here I must say one word in favour of this mysterious hermit. The *piet-my-vrou* devours the sort of repulsive caterpillars which farmers and gardeners curse, and which other birds are inclined to avoid. So the *piet-my-vrou* is no enemy of the human race, but a bird with a definite economic value.

Only when the caterpillar supply dwindles, in March each year, does the *piet-my-vrou* make for its winter quarters in North Africa. Adult males go first, the females leave a week later, and the young birds navigate unaided when all the older birds have departed.

The late Dr. Leonard Gill, most reliable of bird observers, startled the ornithologists some years ago when he announced that he had heard the *piet-my-vrou* in the Cape Town public gardens in midwinter. Dr. Gill began to doubt whether the bird could be a migrant. He thought that the mysterious *piet-my-vrou* remained hidden and mute during the winter.

Nevertheless, other migratory birds leave a few members of the species behind when they fly north. The *piet-my-vrou* was identified during World War II in Abyssinia by South African soldiers. I do not think that Dr. Gill could have been mistaken in the call he heard, though a sensation was caused in Kenilworth some years ago by a parrot which mimicked the *piet-my-vrou* at the wrong time of year.

No one knows whether the call of the *piet-my-vrou* is a claim to the area it has occupied, or a mating cry. Some people find the call hideous, especially when it occurs in the early hours of the morning. Shooting a *piet-my-vrou* brings bad luck, like shooting an albatross, and a man lost his job and his wife

(according to newspaper report) for this reason. Apparently the only safe way to get rid of a noisy *piet-my-vrou* is to imitate the call. The bird then fears a rival and flies off.

Dr. William J. Pickerill, when conductor of the Cape Town orchestra, set the call of the *piet-my-vrou* to music. He found such inspiration in this bird music that he contemplated writing a piece called "On Hearing the First Piet-my-vrou in Spring." I feel that Cape Town lost something when "Pick" failed to complete this avian masterpiece.

If there is any pleasure to be found in the proximity of snakes, the Cape Peninsula has a treat on the doorstep indeed. Fortunately

escapes are much more common than bites. Nearly everyone has almost trodden on a snake, but I cannot remember one friend of mine who felt the fangs sinking into his flesh.

Dr. Walter Rose, reptile expert, once told me that he did not consider the peninsula a dangerous place from that point of view. Snakes were plentiful enough, because he had met a visiting snake collector whose bag amounted to four hundred cobras within a short time. "Never play the fool with a snake," advised Dr. Rose, and I agreed heartily.

Snakes are regarded as friends by the Kirstenbosch staff. Cobras, adders and non-poisonous species



prey on the field-mice and rats which eat the seeds of proteas and other indigenous plants. Kill off the snakes, say the botanists, and there would be no flowers.

Although there are twenty-five species of snakes in the Peninsula, only the Cape yellow cobra, the *rinkals*, puff adder, berg adder, and the back-fanged *boomslang* and *skaapsteker* are deadly. The last two snakes claim few victims, as they have difficulty in injecting the poison. Nevertheless, the slender *boomslang* has caused two deaths in recent years. These snakes cannot be “milked” as easily as other species; often they must be killed before the venom can be extracted. Thus it is hard to secure serum against *boomslang* venom. Fish

Hoek is a great place for the *boomslang*.

Cobras have been found in houses at Woodstock, and the Cape Flats are alive with them. You may encounter one on the beaches, right down to high water mark. For years I have walked on Blaauwberg beach and rested in the shade of a favourite bushy dune. Often I have opened my eyes to find myself surrounded by birds, and in spring the black and orange butterflies settled on the flowers. Then came a time when the birds deserted my resting place. I noticed tunnels thrown up near the surface of the sand, because my feet sank into them; and wondered how a mole would find its food in that wilderness. I would not have loafed

happily on that dune if I had known the real inhabitant of those tunnels. It slipped down one entrance just before I put my bare foot on it – a huge yellow cobra. Now I have had to find a new resting place, and even when winter comes I remember that cobra.

I suppose you are aware that all police stations keep a supply of snake-bite serum. This is worth knowing in a city with snakes on the doorstep.

## **Chapter Thirteen**

### **EXOTIC FUR AND FEATHER**

BY now, everyone knows the danger of transporting various forms of animal life to new surroundings. These foreigners, insects, birds or mammals, may create havoc and upset the balance of nature in a far country as some have done in the Cape. Others have proved harmless, but you never know. Never take this chance just to see what happens.

People often ask why the wild rabbit has never become a menace in South Africa. Rabbits were probably the first of all the European animals to be left at the Cape. Some were placed on Robben Island, Dassen and the Saldanha Bay islands; and I am sure that many pairs have been

released on the mainland at various times. Saldanha island rabbits have been observed swimming, and these islands are not far from the shore.

Admiral Cornelius Maaklof of Holland was the man who stocked Robben Island with rabbits. That was early in the seventeenth century, and fifty years later Van Riebeeck found "rabbits in abundance." I, too, often saw a multitude of rabbits when I sailed over to the island thirty years ago in my little sloop *Lulu*. That was after the settlement had been abandoned. Only the lighthouse-keepers were living there, and the bold rabbits came out of their limestone burrows in hundreds and scampered about the deserted gardens.

They were exactly the same species as the rabbits I had seen as a boy in Warwickshire, *Lepus cuniculus* of the zoologists. Dassies (which are members of a different species) and hares found on the mainland are, of course, entirely different from these imported rabbits. No one could understand why so many had survived for so long on sandy Robben Island. Grass is scarce in the dry summer. However, the rabbits climb trees, eat the leaves, gnaw bark, dig out bulbs and even munch seaweed when nothing tastier is available.

Hundreds of tame cats heard the call of the wild on Robben Island, left their civilised hearths and went to live in the rabbit burrows. Usually they ate rabbits, and it was

said that one taste of this delicious meat made them leave home for good. Sometimes cats and rabbits lived together on good terms.

Wolfe, garrison commander in the eighteen-thirties, took it into his head to protect the rabbits! He reported: "The rabbits, of which there were myriads, were strictly preserved, and pheasants were placed in similar quarantine. Quail were found in such large numbers that eighty brace were secured with one gun in a day."

It was the island sanctuary, of course, that caused these rabbits to flourish for centuries. Rabbits breed from four to eight times during a year. The young rabbit starts breeding at six months. Three

to eight baby rabbits appear in each litter. It has been estimated that one female may have well over one million descendants within four years.

But on the Cape mainland, enemies pounced on the rabbits. Long before the timid invaders could breed in such numbers as to ensure survival, the jackals, muishonds, rooikats and genets were on them. Rabbits will never be able to devour the Cape pastures.

Just as well that South Africa has these fierce defenders. Perhaps you know that the rabbits which almost defeated the tough Australians were Robben Island rabbits. Captain Arthur Philip picked up five when

the First Fleet put into Table Bay. Five were quite enough.

Three centuries after the arrival of the harmless rabbits at the Cape came the far more dangerous and less appetising squirrels. Some say they enjoy eating squirrels. It is a pity that there is no demand in Cape Town for this destructive brigand of the trees.

Cecil Rhodes, who would never have become famous as a zoologist, has been blamed for importing the grey squirrel, *sciurus carolinensis*. Rhodes is reported to have said that the Cape Peninsula oaks needed more life, and he decided that the pranks of the bushy-tailed, leaping squirrel would charm the onlooker. In this he was right, but he could

never have imagined the havoc which the fierce and hungry squirrels would cause in the nests of bulbuls and *witogies*.

I think that Rhodes was to blame for these undesirable immigrants. They came in 1900, and at the same period Rhodes is known to have introduced red deer and also certain exotic birds, the European starling, the song thrush, black-bird and chaffinch: The squirrel must have formed part of that unhappy scheme – the most disastrous part.

Few people were aware in those days of the curse which may arise from small imported colonies of squirrels or birds. Britain had received half a dozen pairs of grey squirrels from America ten years

previously, and these were released in the strange menagerie called Woburn Abbey. They are now a nuisance over large areas of south-east Britain. And the Rhodes squirrels have robbed many a Cape home of the bird songs in the trees.

Another crime for which the squirrel has been convicted (but not punished) is the theft of silver-tree and other protea seeds. Silver-trees have a hard struggle to survive at the best of times. Squirrels have prevented the natural regeneration of some of the most interesting Cape flora.

Every squirrel watcher has seen the mysterious, desperate burying of acorns and nuts carried out wherever squirrels live. Seldom do

the squirrels return to these hoards. Winter comes, and the squirrel finds its food somehow without digging up the summer nuts.

Unlike the rabbit, the squirrel has no serious enemies. Jackal buzzards, those black, red-breasted demons of the heights, have been seen flying off with squirrels in their talons. But far more often it is the squirrel that emerges from a tree trunk with a young bird in its mouth.

Red squirrels also came to the Cape under the Rhodes plan. These are among the most beautiful of mammals, with feathery ears, golden-red fur, and enormous tails which they fluff out and use as parachutes. The red squirrels soon

died out, while the grey bandit goes on winning its war on the birds.

No serious attempt has ever been made to wipe out the grey squirrel. Zoologists believe that it is now too late. Contrary to popular belief, the municipality has never offered a reward for squirrel tails. In the year 1957 the Cape Divisional Council was paying sixpence a tail, but a total of two guineas was paid out and the reward was withdrawn.

Only when an animal becomes a popular table delicacy, I think, does the possibility of extinction arise. I have an untested recipe if you are interested. Skin and clean your squirrel like a rabbit, and soak it in water overnight. Chop into small pieces. Melt butter or dripping in a

stew pan, dip the squirrel meat in flour and fry until the flour is well browned. Add one pint of stock, one onion and a little parsley, season with salt and pepper, stir until it boils and then simmer for two hours.

Two horses were observed by the astonished Hottentots of the Cape Peninsula some months before Van Riebeeck arrived. Zebras were the only members of the horse family known in South Africa at that time.

Zoologists believe that the equines originated in America and died out there after some had crossed the former land bridge to Asia. True wild horses developed in Asia and Europe; while those of the tribe that migrated into Africa evolved

as the various zebra species and wild asses.

Those domestic horses seen at the Cape more than three centuries ago could not have wandered down the continent from the north. They were put on shore from some unknown ship, for reasons which are hard to guess, and left to fend for themselves. It is possible that they were shipwreck survivors. One horse was killed by some beast of prey. The other lonely horse, with a rope halter still round its neck, was seen by Van Riebeeck's men on the slopes of Table Mountain. No one could catch him, for horses soon revert to the wild state.

The mystery of those first two horses has never been solved. It is



unlikely that the details of their landing will ever come to light after so many years.

Van Teylingen brought horses from the Dutch East Indies during the first year of the settlement. "The settlers need horses to ride as much as they need bread for their mouths," Van Riebeeck wrote. Other horses arrived from St. Helena. To the regret of all, a beautiful stallion was killed by lions.

Dogs were barking on the beach when Vasco da Gama stepped on shore. Unlike the horses, the ancestors of these dogs must have made the long journey right down the African continent with their masters.

Several breeds reached the Cape from Europe in Van Riebeeck's time, old breeds such as the hardy Dutch barge dog, the bloodhound, greyhound and deerhound. No doubt the Huguenots brought a few poodles. Terriers arrived in the early days, and pointers and spaniels. But you would have looked in vain for such modern favourites as the Alsatian, for this breed had not yet appeared.

Watchdogs were needed in the little Cape settlement to give warning of Hottentot raiders or runaway slaves. Hyenas, the first scavengers of the outpost, soon lost their loot when the dogs came on the scene. Robben Island's guardians appealed to Governor Isbrand Goske for a good greyhound to

tackle the rabbits infesting the vegetable gardens.

One of the early placaaats ordered herdsmen not to allow their dogs on the veld without heavy cudgels fastened to the dogs' necks. This was to prevent the killing of game.

Cape Town's first "lost dog" advertisement was printed in 1802, in one of the earliest issues of the *Government Gazette*. Not long afterwards the same paper reported that "two setting dogs of the best sort," the property of Mr. J. G. van Reenen, had been stolen.

A shipment of Newfoundlands, terriers and spaniels reached Cape Town from England in 1818, and was sold on arrival. Eight years later the Police Superintendent W.

C. van Ryneveld warned dog-owners: "All dogs found in the streets after 10 p.m., and until 6 a.m., with or without collars will, with the authority of the government, be destroyed".

De Lorentz, the police superintendent in 1829, reported that the number of ownerless dogs had become a great nuisance in the town. He asked owners to secure their dogs for a short period, and then he killed the strays. Another dog massacre took place the following year.

Cape Town's dogs were decimated by an epidemic a century ago. Among the survivors was a well-known character about the town, a Newfoundland owned by Findlay

the tobacconist. The *Cape Argus* described this dog as a faithful newspaper messenger. "It calls regularly and punctually at the office, wags its tail when the paper is given to it, and hurries home."

The newspaper also recorded a queer dog fatality in the country. A fairly large dog was asleep at the back of a store when it was picked up by an eagle, dropped from a height and killed.

Dog-owners had to pay a tax of five shillings at that period, and were called upon to produce their dogs at the Town House in Greenmarket Square. The *Cape Argus* complained that the current exhibition proved that there were few really good dogs in the town.

About thirteen hundred dogs were registered in 1875.

Cape Town's favourite dog in 1886 was Bob, a cross between a retriever and a Newfoundland, the pet of the fire-brigade. "Bob goes to all fires with the first men out, but will not bother about parades or exercise turn-outs," said a newspaper report. "He fetches cakes from the shops for the men. Twice a day regularly he calls at the *Cape Argus* office for morning and evening editions, and takes the fire brigade's copies."

The firemen have had many dogs since then, and in recent years "Fireman Bones" carried on the tradition of Bob.

Now for the birds from abroad. I feel sure there were cage-birds from Holland in very early days; and I have found a report of the arrival in Cape Town of one thousand singing birds just over a century ago. Nightingales, thrushes and linnets were imported by one Herman Reiche.

English robin redbreasts, most friendly of birds, also came to Cape Town after the middle of last century. I do not know whether any breeding pairs escaped, but not one of the species I have mentioned seems to have become established at that time.

In fact, birds seldom survive when released in a different continent. Rhodes did little harm with his

song thrushes, blackbirds and chaffinches; for the thrushes and blackbirds are probably extinct and the chaffinches have never spread far from Groote Schuur. But the starlings are a menace.

Starlings carry lice into houses. Millions of aggressive starlings twitter in Cape gardens, evicting more interesting birds, and flourishing at the expense of the indigenous birds. Ornithologists calculate that the starling population of the Cape Peninsula exceeds that of any other species. These greedy fruit-eaters are detested by all owners of orchards. They gobble up the insects which nourish other birds such as bokmakeries and wagtails. They are now found as far north as the

Orange River, and they are still spreading.

Starlings became a plague in the grounds of the Groote Kerk in Church Square, but they have been kept at bay by a most ingenious device. Tape records were made of the cry of an anxious starling. A loudspeaker in a tree broadcast the cry, which terrified the unwelcome visitors.

Cape Town's pigeons are harmless, and even beautiful when they are not fouling roofs, window-sills or hats. They have disturbed the services in St. George's Cathedral, and they worried the Dean so much that he spent hours with a gun without securing a very impressive bag.

Homing pigeons were employed by the *Cape Argus* during the South African War to carry messages from the various fronts. Their loft was behind the Old Town House in Greenmarket Square. Nearly sixty years after the end of that war, the man who fed the pigeons was still alive. And the descendants of those pigeons still live on the property and peck at *Cape Argus* windows. They do not go hungry.

Pigeons were fed on mealies at the Castle for some years, and sightseers were always fascinated by the spectacle of a sergeant-major surrounded by eager pigeons twice a day. The mealies were cut off a few years ago, but it was a long time before the pigeons gave up parading for their food.

The smallest of the foreign invaders is probably the greatest pest of all. This is neither furred nor feathered. It is the Argentine ant which came from Buenos Aires in cargoes of forage during the South African War. No local ant could stand up to the fierce Argentinians, so you will now find the Cape ant species only in the mountains.

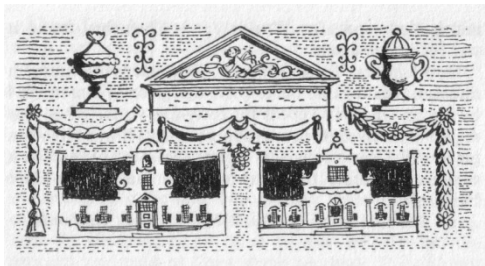
Argentine ants emerge in summer (as you know, to your cost) and raid unprotected food. They love fig trees and flowering gums. Fledglings in nests meet ghastly deaths when the ants attack them. Some local species of wasps and bees have been wiped out by these ants.

I suppose it was impossible to prevent the landing of the Argentine ant. But the squirrels and the starlings were unnecessary, a reckless and deplorable example of the harm which can be done thoughtlessly by the hand of man.

One last, well-known immigrant must not be forgotten – the giant tortoise from Aldabra Island in the Indian Ocean which lived for years in the South African Museum grounds. I used to feed that tortoise on sandwiches through the fence when I was a schoolboy. They called it Pieter, and it died soon after World War I. Then they found it was really Petronella.

How old was Petronella? Dr. Peringuey, the museum director,

recalled that the tortoise was given to him in 1884 by a man who had kept it for forty-five years. When this man had received it (as a wedding present) it was already a giant. All I can say is that Petronella must have been a centenarian, older than any other animal in the Cape Peninsula.



## Chapter Fourteen

### THE OLD HOUSE LAY STILL

*"Old house, are you kind, will  
you love us?" I asked  
And the old house lay still.  
It stretched its grey limbs in  
the sun as it basked  
On the side of the hill.*

ALYS FANE TROTTER

OLD pictorial maps of Cape Town show a number of neat farms on the mountain slopes. Each homestead looked as though it had all the

room in the world and was never likely to be disturbed. Well, the farms have gone, but *mirabile dictu*, after hundreds of years, some of the old houses are still there.

As a boy I lived for years among some of the famous homesteads, and close to other fine mansions. Leeuwenhof, Welgemeend, Saasveld, Bellevue, Rheeziht, Nooitgedacht, Oranjezicht; they had grand names. Leeuwenhof was then the home of my friend, the late Leonard Crowder. And at Welgemeend, one lunch hour during the school term, I was entertained by the Hofmeyrs to a *tamatie bredie* which I have never forgotten.

Some of these houses had been decorated by the Thibault-Anreith



partners. All of them had walls built to last for centuries. One found garlanded mouldings; steps of Batavian bricks; high, wide, slate-paved stoeps with vine trellises; fanlights and louvered shutters; huge flooring tiles, doors with curved heads, and solid, defensive shutters strong enough to repel a slave mutiny.

Saasveld House was one of several places supposed to have been linked with the Castle by a secret passage. That is a legend which I have never been able to accept. But there is another legend with basis of fact; the story one still hears in many old houses of the slave nurse who saved a white baby from murderous slaves by hiding the child in a Dutch oven.

Waterhof at the top of Hof Street was the first homestead where I heard this legend. Waterhof was a threemorgen farm cut out of the large Leeuwenhof property late in the eighteenth century. The handsome thatched house was built at that period, with its long flagged stoep, high drawing-room and terrace. Johan Hendrik Hofmeyr, an ancestor of “Onze Jan”, bought the property in 1794.

Years ago I came across an old book called “Men of the Times”, a compilation published in 1906, which described Waterhof and its owner. There were details of a room with three solid deep-stained doors, “breathing antiquity from every knob, panel and beam”. The writer declared that the first

Hofmeyr to occupy the house was there with his wife and child when a slave was flogged. This caused great indignation among the other slaves, and two men murdered Hofmeyr and his wife with knives. The slave nurse saved the child, a little girl, by hiding her in the oven; and this girl became the grandmother of “Onze Jan” Hofmeyr. The guilty slaves were caught, one at Kloof Nek, the other at Toll Gate, and were hanged, drawn and quartered.

This account sounds circumstantial, but when I searched the life of “Onze Jan” Hofmeyr for confirmation I could find no mention of such a ghastly episode.

Dorothea Fairbridge gave a similar version of the Waterhof legend in her beautiful and valuable work “Historic Houses of South Africa”. She said the household slaves mutinied with the amiable intention of murdering every member of the family. A young slave girl hid the sleeping baby in the brick baking-oven in the yard. Then she ran about and yelled with everyone else, though her faithful heart must have beaten quickly with fear that the child would wake and add his voice to the chorus. (A little boy this time, you observe). But he slept through it all, as a healthy baby would, “and lived to hand the story down to his children’s children”. Dorothea Fairbridge adds a ghost legend. “You may

hear the pattering footsteps of the mutinous slaves , whenever you care to listen for them.”

Nooitgedacht in Oranjezicht, one of dozens of “unexpected” places, has the same legend in a different form. This was a very old farm, first granted in 1708, with a single-storeyed building. Later, it seems, a skilful architect (who may have been Thibault) added a storey and ornamented the house and slave lodge.

The master and mistress (runs the legend) returned from a banquet at Government House one night, and were murdered by the slaves. Here the brave slave girl hid herself and the baby in a dark cupboard upstairs. During the search the

slaves used knives tied to bamboos to reach into every dark corner; but although the slave girl’s feet were pierced she did not cry out.

At Nooitgedacht, the legend continues, the murdered husband and wife may still be heard running up and down the corridor, looking for their baby.

Now here is Bellevue, once the homestead of Michiel Smuts, and here legend and truth approach one another. Two centuries ago the building stood very much alone, and it is hard to imagine the wild forest scene when you drive over the former lands, up the Kloof Road, along Warren Street, and past St. John’s Hostel at the top of Kloof Street. That was the Bellevue

farm area, and an aquatint copied by Arthur Elliott gives a good idea of the place in the slave days. Near the house was a deep ravine.

In the eighteenth century, bands of runaway slaves known as *drosters* were able to live in the Table Mountain caves and other remote hiding-places on the Cape Flats with a fair prospect of safety. When they raided the farms or homes on the Cape Town outskirts they were often caught. But even now a clever fugitive with some means of feeding himself could remain in freedom on the mountain.

Michiel Smuts, thirty-year-old owner of Bellevue in 1760, scolded a slave. This slave, a West African negro named Achilles, ran away

and joined a party of *drosters* living in the mountains above Hout Bay. Achilles led a raid on Bellevue in which more than twenty desperate men took part.

On the morning of July 15, 1760, the people of Cape Town were horrified by the news that Michiel Smuts and his wife and their little boy of five had been murdered by the slaves. The *drosters* had carried knives and assegais. After the murder they had looted the homestead and carried off a pistol, a silver soup ladle and other items of silver. A faithful slave on the Bellevue estate had seen the murderers entering the kitchen and had hurried off to report to the nearest neighbour, Pieter van Breda. However, help came too late

to save Michiel Smuts and his wife and son.

Commandos rode out and traced the murderers across the Salt River to Plattekloof in the Tygerberg. Here there was a fight, one burgher was killed, and the slaves escaped. More commandos were then called up, and the *drosters* were cornered on the Cape Flats. During the fight, seven slaves were killed and others were wounded. It appears from the record in the Cape archives that most of the wounded were put to death on the spot; but twelve slaves captured unwounded, and one wounded slave, were brought to the Castle for trial.

Pieter van Rhee de van Oudtshoorn the fiscal prosecuted and the

evidence was heard by a council of twelve. Besides the negro Achilles there were, among the accused, slaves from the East Indies, one from Cape Town, others from India.

According to the evidence, Mrs. Smuts was killed because she tried to help her husband, and the boy was put to death when he screamed.

The slaves had lived on mussels, and had also stolen sheep from Jan Biesje's Kraal (now Milnerton). One member of the band had been shot dead while raiding J. van Reenen's farm. They had intended to hide in the great, remote caves near Hangklip until the spring. Then they planned to find safety in the kaffir country.

Achilles was sentenced to torture with red hot pincers, after which he was broken on the wheel and left to die. Eleven other slaves were broken on the wheel with or without the coup de grace. The thirteenth man escaped with his life, but he was thrashed and kept in chains for ten years. Governor Tulbagh confirmed the sentences.

The court record does not mention the oven episode. Nevertheless, two Smuts children survived the night of tragedy at Bellevue, and there seems every reason to believe the family tradition that they were, in fact, saved by a slave girl and hidden in the oven. One was a mere baby, the slave girl was her wet-nurse, and it is most unlikely that the two survivors would have been

anywhere but under their parents' roof on the night of the raid.

Susanna Margaretha was one survivor; the other was Servaas Josias, who died young. Susanna Smuts married M. J. Moller in 1777; and after his death she married William Buissinne. It is on record that Susanna was brought up as an orphan. Because of her sympathy for children without parents she helped to found the Long Street orphanage.

Baron C. H. de Lorentz, the magistrate, became owner of Bellevue early last century. Later the house with its celebrated garden came into possession of the Tielman Roos family.

Possibly there were other homes in which young children were saved by the slaves. Only at Bellevue have I been able to find convincing proof of the legend.

Rheezicht, so named because of the view of the Table Bay roadstead, has been shut in by flats in recent years. But when the stately house was built early in the eighteenth century, high up in Oranjezicht, the view must have been indeed magnificent.

This old home of the Van Bredas is the only historic gabled house left in the city. It was a farm within living memory, black soil yielding vegetables, peaches and pears, figs and grapes. In the old slave quarters there was a dairy. The

original kitchen garden survived World War II. Apart from a fire between the wars, Rheezicht seems to have dreamed through the centuries without much drama. Under the new thatch the restored mansion is smarter than ever before.

Leeuwenhof, the oldest and once the finest mansion in Table Valley, was named because it arose in the shadow of Lion's Head. No doubt the lions were not far away when it was built, for the first grant bears a faraway date before the end of the seventeenth century.

Burchell, a century later, admired the cassia and oleander trees which had grown up there; and soon afterwards Latrobe was entranced

by “the portico, or gallery, running along the whole front of the building, an espalier roof entirely covered with vines, the grapes hanging down in great profusion and beauty.”

A carved teak staircase at Leeuwenhof is possibly the most distinctive piece of Chinese craftsmanship in any old Cape home. This double-storeyed house has the typical flat roof of the late seventeenth century.

Leeuwenhof has a ghost and a legend to explain it. Sir John Kotze, the judge, whose father owned the house a century ago, claimed to have seen the ghost when he was sixteen years old; and the full story of this encounter

appeared in his memoirs. In a dark passage young Kotze saw “a tall woman dressed all in white. Her hair was dark brown and her eyes were blue. She gazed at me sadly as she moved along.”

In the Dutch East India Company's days the daughter of the official who owned Leeuwenhof had a love affair with the master of one of the company's ships. The official disliked the young seaman and trumped up a false charge which led to the man being executed. Soon afterwards the girl died of a broken heart. One historian who probed the legend deeply suggested that the wicked official was Johan Blesius, the fiscal. Blesius lived at Leeuwenhof in its very early days, and he had a daughter Joan. Blesius



planted the oaks in what became Kotze Street, where I lived.

I often interviewed Sir John Kotze when I was a reporter, and I recorded his vigorous opinions on the law, juries and other matters after he had retired and when he was approaching ninety. He was one old man I was always eager to hear. Never could I understand how a person of such balance and common-sense (even in old age) could have imagined that Leeuwenhof ghost. Perhaps there was a ghost! I am more ready to accept his story than others I have heard.

Sir John Kotze remembered the time, in the middle of last century, when leopards prowled round the

homesteads along the upper fringe of the Gardens. One day Kotze's father received a message from his neighbour Smuts of Belvedere, to come and see a leopard he had shot the night before. There it was, hanging from an oak tree, only ten minutes' walk from Leeuwenhof.

The leopard had killed a calf in a kraal near the Belvedere homestead and eaten half of it. Smuts knew that it would return to the scene; so he loaded his gun with the large buckshot called lopers and waited in the tree. At last Smuts saw the leopard on a low roof. He fired, and it rolled over dead into the yard. That was suburban life in the Cape Town of 1855.

It is usually impossible to fix the exact ages of these old Cape Town homes, though the grant of the land provides a clue. Welgemeend, the famous Hofmeyr family home for nearly two centuries, was granted to Andries de Man as far back as 1693. The left wing and wine cellar seem to have been built early in the eighteenth century and Stephanus Hofmeyr gave the house its present appearance early last century.

Welgemeend has a huge stoep with pillars and an ancient vine. Some of the yellowwood beams and ceilings and the doors with copper mountings are very old. This is also one of the houses with long-lived windows; for on April 25, 1868 a Mr. I. van der Spuy signed his

name with a diamond, and the pane is still there.

A memorial gable, modelled on the style of 1700, was built in 1916 over the room where “Onze Jan” Hofmeyr worked; and in a niche there is a bust of “Onze Jan” by Van Wouw.

Zonnebloem, on the slopes of Devil’s Peak, a wine farm early in the eighteenth century, has survived because it was bought by Bishop Gray and used for the education of the sons of native chiefs. The wine cellar became a chapel. Girl boarders now occupy the old slave quarters.

White students attended Zonnebloem for many years, and one who left in 1906 wrote as

follows: “Zonnebloem has peculiar characteristics of its own. Among these is the unrivalled opportunity it gives for becoming acquainted with a variety of people, habits and characters. How cosmopolitan Zonnebloem has always been! There have always been representatives of many peoples – Zulus, Xhosas, Pondos, Basutos, Barotses, Bechuanas, Barolongs, Matabeles, Englishmen, Scotsmen, Welshmen, Irishmen, Dutchmen from Holland as well as from the Transvaal and a host of others. Yet there is never discord, but perfect unity between all, each respecting the other.”

The original Zonnebloem homestead was burnt down during a strong south-easter in 1922. It

was rebuilt to the old plan, however, and became the warden’s house.

Among the vanished farms I must mention Uitkyk, known later as Culver House. Designed by Thibault in the middle of the eighteenth century, the beautiful homestead stood in Upper Buitenkant Street.

The farm was granted to one Weiringe in 1715. Several old Cape families occupied the house in turn; but strange to say the lovely relic passed through the centuries without acquiring a legend, a ghost, or any of those dramatic episodes which add to the atmosphere of other such homesteads. A man who was born at Uitkyk informed me

some years ago that he had searched in vain for details of his birthplace. Perhaps that was the secret of Uitkyk's charm. One owner after another enjoyed the peace of the cool and lofty rooms, the fruit and flower gardens, the secluded lily ponds. They sat on the high stoep, surveying the old oaks and the town below, and nothing happened to destroy the tranquil heritage of Uitkyk.

Streams from Table Mountain irrigated the farms I have mentioned. One vigorous stream also worked a water-mill at the top of the Avenue. This was Wouter Mostert's mill that ground the settlement's meal in distant 1682, while the property known as Hope Mill survived until a decade ago.

Wouter Mostert's house, and the vine he planted, lasted until 1952. Parts of his thick granary walls were still there. Now all these relics have gone; the slave musicians' gallery, the fine teak doors and windows shaded by the enormous vine. Museums have secured fragments of the mill that was built to meet early Cape Town's recurring bread famines.

Another fine Dutch mill, completed by Johann Gottfried Mocke in 1782, stands in the Alexandra Institute grounds. It now serves as a chapel, with room for one hundred and fifty people; but during World War I, when there was a military hospital nearby, it was used as a detention barracks.

Some historians claim that Mocke's mill is older than Mostert's Mill, for the millers who succeeded Mostert did not finish the building until 1796. The farm on which Mocke built his mill was the historic Oude Molen. Owner of Oude Molen about sixty years ago was McKenzie, the cartage contractor I have already mentioned. He grazed his powerful Clydesdale horses on the farm, and kept his cavalcade of Scotch carts, wagons and wagonettes there.

Mowbray has some eighteenth-century farm relics, including the historic Koornhoop property. Koornhoop was a fort built in Van Riebeeck's time; but it became a farm in 1676 and in 1936 it was still a dairy farm. A dovecot and

flanking gables go back to 1790, when Servaas van Breda occupied the farm.

Westhoe, part of Koornhoop, has an old homestead of uncertain age. Mr. A. L. Willmot kept dairy cows there until 1929. In the sixteen rooms of the homestead are yellowwood beams cut in the Tokai forests. Walls are three feet six inches thick. A recent owner discovered in the grounds the foundations of an old Dutch windmill which may have been a replica of the Rhodes Drive windmill.

Rouwkoop House, about a century old and one of the last Rondebosch farm homesteads, was demolished in 1962. It stood on the farm once

known as Groeneveld, granted to Herman Remajenne only five years after Van Riebeeck's arrival. Vredenburg, not far away, survives after nearly two centuries, though farming came to an end there about fifty years ago.

Other old farms in this area were Valkenberg and Welgelegen. Fields of wheat and vineyards once ran along the present main road at Mowbray. The map of Cape Town has been transformed since the spacious days of those serene farms on the mountain slopes. But search beyond the high flats and modern houses and you will find the last, gracious remnants of the untroubled years.

## **Chapter Fifteen**

### **VAULTS AND KRAMATS**

MOST of the very old Cape Town families had their own vaults on burial grounds within their estates. A few of these interesting relics are still to be found in the midst of the modern city.

Probably the most conspicuous, and with a grisly story, is the Woutersen-Wessels family vault at the top of Wessels Road in Green Point. Thousands of cars pass along the High Level Road every day just above this handsome white building. (Hermann Schutte, that fine old architect is believed to have designed it). The vault stands on a pediment, and is fifteen feet high and twenty-five feet square.

Pieter Woutersen ordered the vault, and when he died in 1827 his remains were placed there. Woutersen and his wife Maria de Villiers (who was his first cousin) were descendants of Pierre de Villiers, a great Cape viticulturist of Simon van der Stel's day.

Back in 1827 the vault formed such a prominent landmark on the hillside that it was placed on the charts and used by seamen taking bearings in Table Bay.

A leading member of the Wessels family late last century was Mr. Jacobus Wessels,<sup>5</sup> an attorney.

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<sup>5</sup> My recent book, "A Decent Fellow Doesn't Work" (Timmins) has a chapter on psychic experiences in which Mr. Wessels appears.

He had a great reputation as a hypnotist. People who had come under his influence would behave strangely after meeting him in the street. It was said that he could make a person halt some distance away, and remain standing with an arm or foot raised.

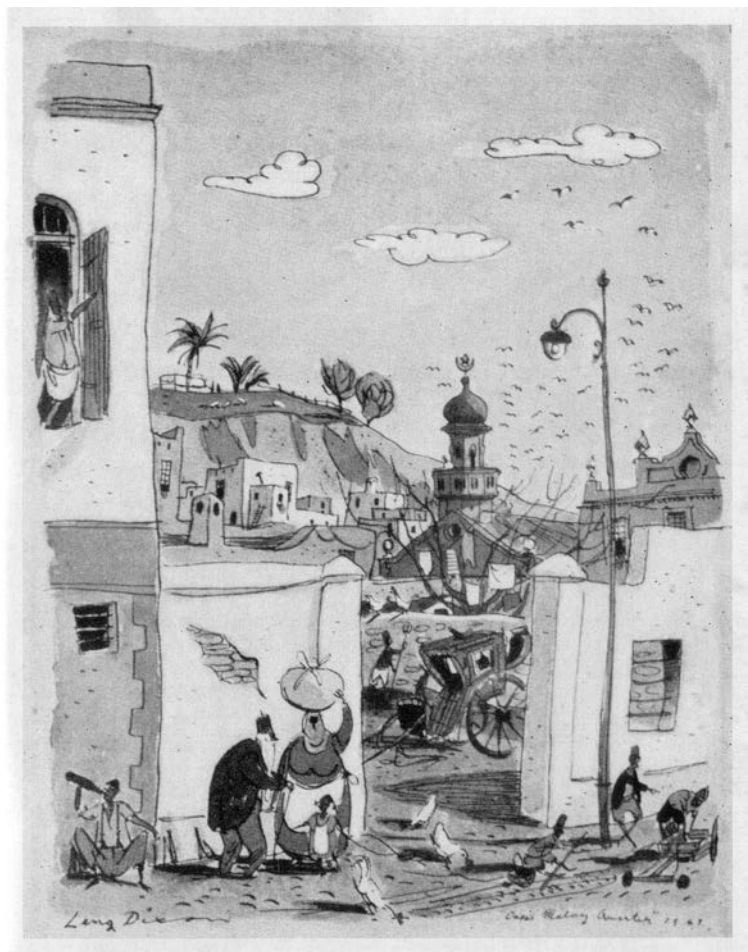
Jacobus Wessels died in 1889 and was laid to rest in the vault. The door remained locked until another member of the family died. Then it was found that the coffin of Jacobus Wessels had been opened and the head cut off and taken away. There was a theory that some ignorant ghoul had stolen the head in the hope of dissecting the brain and learning the secret of Jacobus Wessels' hypnotic powers.

The vault was raided on several occasions and brass and silver plates were stolen from the coffin and jewellery from the bodies. Then the great iron door was sealed to prevent thefts. Mr. M. L. Wessels was buried close to the vault early this century.

Burials outside the official Cape Peninsula cemeteries have been extremely rare during this century, for special permission must be secured. The surviving vaults and burial places are hard to find among the houses that have grown up round them.

One well-known vault which was demolished as recently as 1950 was the Le Sueur family vault on the High Level Road at Sea Point. It





Malay tradition is fairly clear when you come to the *kramats* under the palms above the quarry at the top of Stand Street.

was built by Ryk le Sueur, founder of the estate (whose story I shall tell presently) early last century. Sandstone was quarried on the farm, and the vault rose near the homestead. Over the heavy teak door was carved the Le Sueur crest. Beautiful magnolia trees were planted round the little building.

The remains of thirteen members of the Le Sueur family were placed in the vault. Before the building was pulled down the coffins were taken to Maitland cemetery. A memorial was built there. Even the magnolia trees have disappeared now, and the wider High Level Road runs over this historic spot.

Saasveld House off Kloof Street, the dignified eighteenth-century

home of Baron Willem Ferdinand van Oudtshoorn, did not long survive the middle of the twentieth century. But the baron's vault is still here, in the grounds of the Monte Rosa hospital. That was once the Baron's farm. Many people in South Africa still observe the tradition that a man should, if possible, be buried on his farm.

Baron van Oudtshoorn died in 1817, and he was said to have given instructions that a desk, a silver inkpot, pens, ink and paper should be left in the vault beside his coffin. Moreover, the inkpot was to be filled with ink regularly. His trustees carried out the first part of his wishes, but they were unwilling to receive spirit messages and so the inkpot remained dry.

Some years ago the vault split open, exposing the coffins of the baron, his wife and a servant. It has been repaired by the Dutch Reformed Church, the baron having left a trust fund for the purpose.

When the Volkshospitaal was built in Hof Street, the Hofmeyr family vault had to go. However, a number of Hofmeyrs who died last century are buried in a private cemetery behind the hospital, and a memorial column marks the spot.

The Van Bredas of Oranjezicht lost their vault early this century in the same way, with the growth of the city. They, too, have a graveyard on the site of the vault, and a memorial.

Four girls of St. Cyprian's found a forgotten vault on the Oranjezicht estate more than half a century ago. The mountain slopes were unspoilt and wooded in those days, and the vault was so overgrown with brambles that they had to use an axe to uncover the door.

There they found the embalmed body of a lovely girl in a glass coffin. Her face was framed by golden curls, there were pearls round her neck, while beside her lay a fan and gloves.

Dr. McGowan Kitching, who investigated the report made by the girls, discovered that the "sleeping beauty" had died (probably from pneumonia) after her first ball at the Castle early last century. Her

parents had dressed her in the parchment brocade and gold satin slippers she had worn at the ball, and built the vault for her far above the town of those days. One of the girls who found the vault went back in recent years and saw that the vault was empty.

For years workers in the post office stores yard in Prestwich Street walked over a forgotten vault. It was uncovered by a bulldozer not long ago, and found to contain the skeletons of three people. The stores had been built on the site of a disused cemetery, cleared more than forty years ago. The vault was in the Anglican section.

Vaults in the old Somerset Road cemeteries were used as shelters by

wretched outcasts in the 'eighties of last century. One rainy night a vault collapsed and several men were buried alive. Police raids followed and many vagrants were arrested and sent to the treadmill.

It was a manure heap at Wynberg that covered a lovely white marble urn with a strange story. Mr. E. J. Sawyer, the archeologist, was responsible for this fine piece of historical detection and the recovery of the urn. Sawyer found the urn in the Wynberg municipal pound, and learnt that it had come from a large tomb close by.

The tomb covered the remains of Henry Batt, and an inscription stated: "He was the founder of Plumstead village." Batt, a wealthy

farmer from Plumstead near London, settled in the Cape early last century. He bought a farm in the present Plumstead area and named it after his birthplace.

Batt was an enterprising farmer and also a patron of the theatre. He held shares that cost him seventeen hundred pounds in the first theatre built in Cape Town, the Riebeeck Square building. But in 1833 the unfortunate Batt was gored to death by one of his own bulls. They shot the bull and buried it under the large tomb where Batt was laid to rest. The tomb still stands in Batt's Road, Wynberg; and the white marble urn, ordered by the widow in England, was removed to the grounds of the South African Museum.

Mr. P. G. M. Scholtz, a schoolboy at the Normal College during the 'nineties of last century, told me that street excavations at that period revealed a number of coffins round about the Groote Kerk. One morning young Scholtz arrived at church some time before the service, so he decided to climb the tower. He went up one ladder after another, the ticking of the huge clock becoming louder on each landing. Finally he was shocked to find a *coffin* right under his nose. Municipal workmen had dug it up and delivered it to the church authorities, and it had been placed in the tower until it could be conveyed to Woltemade. Scholtz recovered from his fright and lifted the lid. "Dust to dust."

Some interesting gravestones are to be seen in the St. George's Cathedral grounds. There in the centre of the city were buried Dr. S. S. Bailey, who served as surgeon in H.M.S. *Juno* at Trafalgar; and Mr. Isaac Manuel, a merchant, who fought under Napoleon at Austerlitz. Their claims to fame were engraved on their tombstones, and they survived these historic battles to end their days in Cape Town.

Above the stone quarry at Observatory there is a round, open space among the trees with the remains of a wire fence. I cannot find the origin of the legend, but the place has been known for many years as the "murderer's grave."

On the Groote Schuur estate is a private cemetery where members of the Mostert and Van Reenen families were buried. The white walls of the cemetery may be seen above Mostert's Mill.

Fish Hoek may possibly one day reveal a strange and ghastly tomb. At the corner of Simonstown Road there is an enormous boulder which has been known for generations as Sewemansklip. According to legend, seven men were working on the first coastal road late in the eighteenth century when the boulder fell on them.

There were no newspapers in those days, and no written account of the accident is available. It is on record, however, that one Jan

Fischer was in charge of road work along the False Bay shore in 1780, and that appears to have been the approximate date of the accident.

Apparently the rock once stood on end, with an overhang providing shelter on its south-east side. Possibly the men were crouching there to avoid the rain during a north-west gale. Then the huge rock was undermined by the torrent and fell on the seven men.

Everyone knows the Malay burial vaults, the *kramats* of the Cape Peninsula. Not so many have seen the most northerly of these tombs, the mysterious Robben Island *kramat*.

Cape Malays have a fair idea of the holy men whose bodies occupy all

the other *kramats* forming a “holy circle” in the Cape Peninsula. Many devout Moslems make a pilgrimage in the spring, saying prayers at each *kramat* and placing bottles of water beside the tombs in the belief that the water will acquire healing properties. Years ago, almost every week-end steamer carried parties of Malays to the Robben Island tomb. Two wars interrupted these observances, and now it is almost impossible for the Malays to visit their sacred place on the prison island.

Those red-fezzed male pilgrims, and the young Malay girls in Guide uniforms, visited an unknown saint. The *kramat*, surrounded by a white limestone wall, is a walk of only a few minutes from the harbour; but

there is no clue to the identity of the man buried there. Records in the Cape archives have been searched again and again without success. There is just the legend of the very holy man, a political rebel from the East Indies, who died as a prisoner on the island within the first half century of Dutch rule at the Cape.

I believe that the first Cape archivist, the Rev. R. C. V. Leibbrandt, did find a vague reference to a political prisoner who arrived from Batavia in the sixteen-sixties and was sent to Robben Island in irons. More than a century later the King of Madura (near Madras) was exiled on the island. However, there is nothing to suggest that these were regarded by

the Moslems as holy men. And the Cape Malays have no written history to rely upon.

Malay tradition is fairly clear when you come to the *kramats* under the palms above the quarry at the top of Strand Street. One of the priests buried there was Towang Kuroo, the man who established the Moslem faith at the Cape. He arrived late in the eighteenth century with two other priests from Java. All three were political exiles.

No one at the Cape possessed a copy of the Koran, so Towang Kuroo wrote out the whole book from memory. Years afterwards this Cape Koran was compared with an authorised version. There was hardly an error. Kuroo's



wonderful feat of memory is still preserved and treasured by the Malay community. Kuroo built the first Cape Town mosque, which still stands in Dorp Street. He was almost a centenarian when he died.

Another famous character who was buried above the quarry was known as “Oupa Skaapie.” He is remembered as a hermit who gave sweets to children. A pet sheep followed him everywhere, hence the nickname.

Two tombs on the Signal Hill ridge are believed to have been built for followers of Sheikh Joseph, the most famous Malay exile of all. Malays still pour oil on these high tombs and pray there.

Next there is the Oudekraal *kramat*, a small, square building with outer walls of brilliant orange and blue beside a stream near Bakoven on the Hout Bay road. According to legend, this holy man was Nureel Mobeen. A prisoner on Robben Island, he escaped by some unknown means and went into hiding on the wild hillside where his *kramat* now stands. No doubt the Malays sent him secret gifts of food, as it would have been hard for such a man to survive on fish and berries, game and birds.

Tablets at the Constantia *kramat* mention two Javanese political prisoners who landed in 1667. The fine white dome is to be seen on Islam Hill, near the old wine farms.

Finally there is the Faure *kramat*, a Mecca indeed for all Moslems in South Africa. This is a magnificent domed *kramat*, worthy of the nobleman from Bantam who died on the windswept Cape Flats more than two and a half centuries ago. And this is a *kramat* with the weirdest story of all.

Hadji Sullaiman Shahmohamed, a Cape Malay leader,<sup>6</sup> made the

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<sup>6</sup> Hadji Sullaiman Shahmohamed, merchant of Bree Street, Cape Town, was the man who gave his fine collection of Greek, Roman and other coins to the South African Museum, with £100 for investment so that other coins could be purchased. "It is possible for a coloured man to take a deep interest

building of the Faure *kramat* his life's work. He first approached a well-known Cape Town architect in 1908, for the shrine was dilapidated and the Hadji yearned to build a monument worthy of Sheikh Joseph. The architect told the little Malay with the black fez that it would be an expensive business.

Meanwhile, descendants of Sheikh Joseph heard of the plan and prophesied that disaster and death would overtake anyone who tampered with the shrine. Hadji

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in matters of ancient history," wrote the Hadji. "I hope that my example, though very meagre, may be followed by other and more wealthy people."

Shahmohamed ignored all warnings and went on saving money.

He saved for seventeen years, and then returned to the architects with thousands of pounds to spend. "This must be like one of the great tombs of old, solid and beautiful, though I am but a poor man and dust under the sun's feet," the Hadji informed the astonished architects.

So they drew up the plans, and in 1923 the great work started. Everyone recalled the prophets of doom when it rained so heavily that houses were flooded and the building of the tomb delayed. Whenever anyone connected with the project fell ill or died, the wise

old Malays shook their heads and repeated the warnings.

One of the building contractors went bankrupt, took poison and died. Often the Hadji was threatened with violence. The new contractor, an eccentric European who went about with a black cat, armed himself with a rifle and fired at ghostly figures on the building site.

There came a night of the new moon, when the remains of Sheikh Joseph were to be exhumed and placed in the new tomb. Everything was ready, concrete dry-mixed, the inscribed marble slab was on the site. The contractor oiled his rifle, supplied his men with pick-handles

and put the black cat in a safe place.

The new moon rose. As the builders approached the site they saw that tools had been stolen, the gate-posts blackened with tar. However, the work was completed, and almost immediately the first pilgrims arrived.

Hadji Shahmohamed called on the architects and paid the final accounts. This was now the year 1929, and the Hadji was in the seventh heaven of delight. He went out at sundown to the tomb and prayed in ecstasy. He was still there when the moon rose. A black figure appeared, silhouetted against the moon, a figure that had often been

seen during the building of the great kramat.

That night, the very night of his triumph, Hadji Shahmohamed died.



## **Chapter Sixteen**

### **HICKSON THE HEALER**

AMONG the unusual personalities who visited Cape Town while I was a young reporter, and made a deep impression upon thousands of people, was Mr. James Moore Hickson, the faith healer. Never before had I observed such gatherings of suffering humanity, praying for relief. Nothing like those services has been seen in Cape Town since Hickson departed.

Hickson was a well-built, pleasant-faced man in the prime of life on that winter day in 1922 when I met him, surrounded by church dignitaries, on board the liner *Euripedes* in Table Bay Docks. He had come to Cape Town as the guest of Archbishop Carter, his mission organised by the Anglican Church; but he made it clear from the start that the sick of all religions would be welcome at his services.

“I am neither a clergyman nor a doctor,” Hickson explained to the group of journalists. “I am a layman, and a student of a subject so vast that one cannot be dogmatic. But I speak from a deep conviction. Christian healing is as old as Christianity, and it is an essential part of the work of Jesus. My task

is to try to revive this ministry of the early church, the spirit of prayer.”

Hickson then quoted Christ’s words: “Carry on my work, go and do likewise, feed My sheep, preach the Gospel and heal the sick”.

No one doubted the honesty of this remarkable character. Hickson told us that he had first discovered his gift when he was fourteen years old. A relative was in great pain caused apparently by neuralgia. Hickson laid his hands on the sufferer and prayed, and pain disappeared. Soon afterwards a young girl with twitching of the muscles (described by Hickson as St. Vitus’s Dance) was cured in the same way.

Here I must raise the question which is bound to occur to every critical reader. Hickson was not a trained diagnostician. How can the claims of the most sincere faith healer be accepted without qualified medical corroboration?

Hickson was fully aware of this problem, and he was always ready to co-operate with orthodox medical practitioners. He told us that he had started his career as a full-time faith healer in London during the South African War. A doctor asked him to see whether he could help a wounded officer suffering from the nervous condition which became known later as “shell-shock”. The officer made a swift recovery. Acting on the doctor’s advice, Hickson then

studied anatomy, physiology and massage, securing a certificate.

However, the medical profession demands more than a mere certificate of that sort, and when Hickson opened a faith healing home he found himself in conflict with the British Medical Council. He went on with his work in spite of criticism.

Hickson, well-dressed, polished and muscular, did not give those he met the impression that they were dealing with a mystic. Nevertheless, there must be something of the mystic about a man who gives his life to faith healing. I was not surprised to hear that Hickson had gone to a lonely isle off

the west coast of Scotland to pray for guidance.

Shortly after World War I he had set out on a world tour. He did not ask the church or any individual for support, but relied on thank offerings from those who had benefited. No collections were taken up at his faith healing services. A special box was placed in the church, and by this means he paid his way round the world. Hickson was in the United States before he came to South Africa, and the grateful Americans made it possible for him to continue his world tour.

So he appeared one July morning at St. George's Cathedral, wearing a plain white surplice. Of course Hickson had fully expected to see the

afflicted people who had crowded into the church. Others looked in surprise mingled with shock upon this pathetic horde. The aisles were like corridors of a hospital. Pain and misery, blindness and deformity were on every bench. Those who could not use crutches were carried in on stretchers. Rich men and women sat among poor creatures in rags. White and coloured mingled. Over all hovered the shadow of disease, and some were all too plainly under the darker shadow of death.

Yet every one of them must have entered the Cathedral either with great faith or with some flicker of hope. Was it right, I wondered, to create an atmosphere of miracles

when the reality must be far different?

Besides the sick of all races, the healing service had drawn ministers of other religions, a certain number of devout worshippers, and others who had come out of curiosity. At Hickson's request, each sufferer wore a card with the name and a brief description of the ailment.

Hickson received the authority and blessing of the church from the archbishop, the Litany of the Sick was recited, and then Hickson addressed the gathering.

"There may be people who have come in the hope of seeing a spectacular display," Hickson began. "Nothing like that can be expected. This is as quiet and



reverent as a communion service. It is as the sowing of seed; it must be watered and nourished by your prayers and your faith. Do not be discouraged if everything does not come at once. As a rule, healing is gradual. Very often it comes with the new life and healing of the soul. So I want you to persevere. Get rid of selfishness. Think of others and not of yourself.

“Doctors effect cures, but the real basis of healing is spiritual. The healing power has been put there by the Creator, who is infinitely greater than the things He created. Christian healing is not going to do away with doctors. All that we ask is common sense. Science teaches us the power of mind over body. Many people, however, go through

life in a spirit of fear, and there is no faith in that. You can use physical and mental remedies without believing in God, but once you approach spiritual healing you are on a different plane.

“Faith is the first step, not faith in physical remedies or any individual, but faith in God. It is God who heals. Our Lord came as a healer in a humble, natural way. He went about healing all manner of disease, ministering to each person’s whole being and not only to the soul. The vision of Christ was deep. He knew that it was no use healing such ills as broken limbs or rheumatism if the person was not mentally healthy. The first step in spiritual healing is to desire a change in your life.

“So this mission is as much concerned with the soul as with the body. Healing is part of the gospel. When spiritual healing is fully recognised it will open the way for those in the church who possess the gift to use and develop it in their visitation of the sick. Then the church will become the life-giving body. When the church of Christ is once more a healing church, then and then only will it be a living church.”

Soft organ music followed the address, and then Hickson asked the whole congregation to take part in silent prayer. “I have noticed that the best results are achieved when there has been the greatest volume of prayer,” he remarked.

After the silence Hickson moved among the sufferers. A clergyman accompanied him, reading out each person’s ailment. Hickson laid his hands on each one, and the archbishop gave his blessing. Inevitably it was a long service. Many of those who knelt were in pain.

Three services were held in the Cathedral, and then Hickson moved on to St. Mary’s, Woodstock. Again the church was besieged by the sick and the deformed. Some arrived in cars, but there were many at Woodstock who were helped out of donkey-carts and Cape carts. St. Mary’s was filled, and seven hundred waited in the churchyard for the laying on of hands. Hickson also visited

hospitals and ministered to many bedridden people in their homes.

Most dramatic of all Hickson's services, and by far the most heart-rending, were those held on Robben Island. The lepers had heard of Hickson the healer, and he responded to their call. No one who was present could possibly forget the scene in the church of the lepers, the row upon row of misshapen and disfigured humanity. I knew Robben Island and the lepers well at that time, and for me there was no sense of shock. But one reporter wrote: "It made the brain reel and the heart grow sick. This was far more horrifying than the scenes in the cathedral."

Another reporter declared: "It was a day of horrors. Even the macabre imagination of Edgar Allan Poe had never conceived anything so terrible. Walking along the quiet country lanes of the island, one might have been far from disease. And then one came upon these pitiful, shuffling creatures, some of them with bodies that ended at the knees, many with distorted faces."

The doctors were observers that day. The lepers sang hymns in Afrikaans with their poor, cracked voices. Some stared at Hickson through bandages, their faces so seriously affected by leprosy that they could not be uncovered. One woman brought her little boy, placed him at Hickson's feet, and

bowed her head in prayer. Both were lepers.

Hickson told the lepers that he could not imagine that God wished them to suffer continually in this manner. "I have come to the island to encourage all of you to pray for recovery," he said. "But you must not look to me. I have no power to heal you. No man has. Only God can do that. I shall lay my hands upon you in the Name of Jesus Christ and pray over you. If healing does not come immediately, do not be discouraged. Go on praying. In my experience, most cases of healing have been gradual. If you have sin on your conscience, confess it to God. You have a deeper need than the healing of the body. It is the healing of the soul. If

your body is healed and not your soul, then in the sight of God you are not healed at all."

One old leper hobbled out of the church saying to his companions: "It was such a man as that who healed the leper two thousand years ago."

Hickson was taken to the hospital wards, the compound where mentally afflicted lepers wandered aimlessly, and the section where women lepers were treated.

"This is one of the most remarkable of all my experiences during my world mission of healing," Hickson summed up as he left the island. "I found it a little disconcerting because of the lack of visual response-there were so many faces

which were unable to show any emotion.”

A thanksgiving service was held at St. George’s Cathedral at the end of Hickson’s mission. Dean Rolt and other members of the clergy reported on the cures and benefits which had come to their notice. The dean gave the name of a personal friend, Mr. F. W. Johnson, who had gone to the altar lame and had walked away cured. Another clergyman described a middle-aged woman, a cripple, who had been declared “beyond medical aid.” She was now walking without crutches, and her whole outlook on life had improved.

Others reported partial or complete recoveries from rheumatism. The

eyesight and hearing of a number of people had improved. Paralysis had vanished from the arms and legs of many sufferers, and bedridden patients had got up and walked.

“We have heard strange things today, and we are convinced that many wonderful things have happened,” declared Dean Rolt. “We have received a spiritual uplift as well as bodily healing. There have been great crowds but no sensationalism. This thing could not be hid and will not be hid.”

“Blind See and Lame Walk,” ran a headline in the *Cape Argus*. Details were given of reported cures.

Hickson received many letters of thanks. He told the reporters that he

could not give names because he felt himself bound to observe secrecy, like the medical profession. Nevertheless, he pointed out that when a number of well-known cripples were seen walking the streets the cures would soon become known.

“Many extraordinary, instantaneous cures have been reported to me,” Hickson claimed. “One woman who had been completely paralysed for years walked about the hospital on the following day. I could not go on with this work unless I found the healing was genuine.”

Hickson declared that a person who possessed the gift of healing felt drawn towards those who were suffering. A heartfelt desire to help

was essential. The gift of healing could be developed by use. Patients should be guided towards a good Christian doctor.

“My mission in Cape Town has been abundantly blessed,” Hickson concluded. “It has brought out the faith of the people and shown how ready they were to be helped. Jew and Gentile, Catholic and Free Church have all come forward.” Clergymen who co-operated with Hickson praised his tactful way with individuals, his wise and reverent conduct. Hickson had always tried to avoid giving the impression that he was a miracle worker; but the clergymen did not doubt that Hickson had the gift of healing. His mission had brought

about a new feeling of comradeship among the clergy.

Sometime after Hickson's departure, the Rev. S. B. Hinchcliff, who had acted as secretary of the healing mission, wrote: "From time to time one is hearing of fresh cases of people who have derived the greatest benefit from laying on of hands. Even where no physical healing has occurred, there has come about a wonderful feeling of joy and peace."

Dr. Carter, archbishop of Cape Town, said that he had been diffident about the mission before Hickson's arrival, but all his fears had been dispersed.

The *Church Chronicle* commented: "No one has been disappointed. It has come to us with amazing force, and made many realise for the first time the power of Christ to heal and save."

The open and inquiring mind of Dr. C. Louis Leipoldt followed Hickson's mission with keen interest. Leipoldt was not religious in the sectarian sense; but he was too fine a doctor to ignore the possibilities of faith healing. Thus I am more inclined to accept Leipoldt's opinion than the views of all those sincere churchmen who were swayed by their emotions.

Leipoldt held that medicine was an art, not a science; an art with its origins in temples and monasteries.

He pointed out that there were individuals whose very presence in the sickroom benefited the patient. Buddha and other great spiritual leaders had possessed the gift of healing to an extraordinary degree.

Of course Leipoldt drew a careful distinction between functional and organic diseases. Functional diseases are those in which the normal working of the body is upset without obvious changes in organs or tissues. Cancer is an organic complaint.

“A miracle is the reversal of a natural law, and I do not believe in miracles,” Leipoldt asserted. “On the other hand, every experienced doctor knows of functional disease alleviated by methods outside

orthodox medicine. Reports of such treatments are as old as history. There have been few opportunities of testing such people, but it is clear that there can be no spiritual healing without faith.”

Leipoldt said that medicine did not deny the power of faith healing, for there was abundant proof of sick people cured by prayer and by suggestion. He thought the correct professional attitude should be “tolerant scepticism,” the attitude which doctors adopted towards all new methods of cure. They should be willing to test each faith healer who appeared on the scene.

Hickson’s campaign offered a splendid opportunity, went on Leipoldt, and might have led to



tangible results. Unfortunately the medical profession had not co-operated, and many doctors had been repelled by the emotional atmosphere of the mission.

Leipoldt, always an individualist, decided to carry out an experiment of his own. He selected twenty children, ten of them suffering from functional disturbances, the other ten victims of organic diseases. He found that two children, both with severe migraine, showed an improvement shortly after attending Hickson's service. Both relapsed a few weeks later, when the excitement had died down. All the rest of the children remained unaffected, though six of them improved in the course of time as

the result of ordinary medical treatment.

Leipoldt was asked to explain why it was that people had been able to discard their glasses after Hickson had prayed over them. He replied that many people wore glasses without really needing such aids.

Nevertheless, the critical Leipoldt admitted that Hickson had undoubtedly healed many sufferers. "He had the gift, and his success would have been greater if he had been assisted by a proper, qualified medical committee," concluded Dr. Leipoldt. "Faith certainly has a share in shaping our destinies."

I share Dr. Leipoldt's belief in the healing of functional disorders by faith. It is neither occult nor

mysterious, but just an example of the unconscious mind sending orders to the body – which the body obeys.

Many a miracle of old may be explained by the removal of unconscious stresses, enabling the body to make its own recovery. A person suffering from pseudo-paralysis may take up his bed and walk. The healer guides the force which is latent in the sufferer.

All through the centuries the “stigmata,” the five wounds received by Jesus, have been displayed by devout people – St. Francis of Assisi and hundreds of others. These organic changes have come about purely by mental processes. “A suitable individual

may exhibit almost any kind of marking on the skin, which is the boundary between the self and the outer world,” pointed out Dr. Harley Williams not long ago. “The means by which these markings are produced lie deeply buried in the unconscious.”

James Moore Hickson and all the spiritual healers before him relied on faith and encouraged others to depend on the power of faith. It is faith that creates what some call miracles, those remarkable episodes which come and go before science can examine them.

## **Chapter Seventeen**

### **SEA POINT WAS A PARADISE**

ONE of the very old men of the long-lived Le Sueur family told me the story of the quiet farm on the mountainside which became part of the monstrous suburb of Sea Point.

They were French aristocrats, the Le Sueurs, of the Protestant faith, living at Bayeux in Normandy, and Fresnaye was a family estate. Many of the Le Sueurs fled with other Huguenots towards the end of the seventeenth century. First of the line to settle at the Cape was the Rev. François le Sueur, who arrived in 1739 as spiritual adviser to Governor Swellengrebel.

One of the clergyman's daughters married Governor Ryk Tulbagh, and

so the name Ryk re-appeared through the years in the Le Sueur family. A son Jacobus had a fierce argument with a high official who was armed with a sword. Jacobus had only a malacca cane with a gold knob but he defended himself successfully. The cane with several cuts on it became an heirloom. Strange to say, the cane seemed to bring misfortune to every owner. Not long ago Alwyn le Sueur removed the gold knob and flung the stick into the sea.

Some of the Le Sueurs returned to Europe when the British occupied the Cape early last century. Ryk le Sueur, a barrister, remained and acquired the Sea Point estate which he called Fresnaye. The original name was Winterslust, and the

farmhouse was the only building on the mountain slopes. Down below, of course, was the Societeit's House, or Heeren Huis near Bantry Bay, the country club built in 1766, the first house in Sea Point.

Fresnaye stood in vineyards and orchards. Some described it as a "Garden of Eden," with its flowers and turtle doves. A spring yielded a good water supply. The farm covered two hundred acres. Buck, guineafowl and partridges were plentiful, and many hunting parties were organised under the giant pines and among the proteas. It is hard nowadays to imagine Fresnaye as a farm. Nevertheless, the old homestead became the nurses' quarters when the Monastery nursing home was built.

Several of the Le Sueurs of Sea Point visited France in the middle of last century and asked Napoleon III to restore the family title. Napoleon agreed on condition that they became Roman Catholics. The Le Sueurs refused and came back to Sea Point.

Wheat was sown on the Signal Hill slopes within living memory. Cows grazed in meadows. Many smallholders grew fruit and vegetables for the market, and some kept ostriches. York Road at Green Point was once the approach to De Goede Verwachting farmhouse built in 1814 and restored not long ago to its former comfort. Slave cottages with thick walls have also been transformed,

and there is now a most artistic terrace.

Not until 1817, when Sea Point House was opened to boarders, did the Atlantic suburb become known as Sea Point. Thirty years passed, and the governor appointed Mr. C. Kirsten as postmaster. Mails were sent and received twice a day. Families who became rooted in Sea Point were moving in, and some of their descendants are still there.

I cannot list all the old Sea Point families, but I can think of some without an effort. Mr. Saunders owned the very old house of somewhat mysterious origin called Bellwood on the mountain-side. He sold Bellwood estate for eight hundred pounds. The land might

fetch two or three hundred times as much today. Mr. Saunders, by the way, gave his name to Saunders Rocks at Bantry Bay.

One branch of the Wichts moved out of town in the eighteen-forties and lived at Mermaid Cottage, which was a large double-storeyed house. Now the immense Rapallo stands on the site. This cool and peaceful coast was one of the most appealing in the whole world before the deadly hand of man destroyed its charm. Wise men like Saul Solomon, statesman and former proprietor of the Cape Argus, felt the call. He settled at Clarensville, a country residence of several acres with cattle, poultry, pigeons and a huge aviary filled with South African birds.

Among the early settlers were the De Smidts, who lived at Groote Schuur in winter and Weltevreden, Sea Point, in the summer. Weltevreden, nicknamed “Honeymoon Cottage,” was on the seafront near the present pavilion. Later it was bought by the Redelinghuis family. There was a splendid garden with vines and gnarled syringas.

Mimosa, another old home now covered by the concrete jungle, was the Fairbridge home. Charles Aken Fairbridge had his library of twelve thousand books there, fine old furniture and pictures. There the author Dorothea Fairbridge was born.

Mr. John Steytler built Arthur’s Seat in 1874, but it did not become an hotel at that period. The Queen’s Hotel was opened in 1887 on the site of Sea Point House, residence of Sir William Hodges, the chief justice. The Marine, scene of the sad 1961 fire, was not so old. A Mr. Peffers bought one of the old Sea Point houses last century, and built a mansion round it. In the garden was a rare paddle leaf tree from New Caledonia. Mr. Peffers sold the house to Mr. W. G. V. Carter during World War I; and Mr. Carter, who had been on the staff of Cecil Rhodes at Groote Schuur, furnished it with antiques and relics linked with Rhodes. Then it was opened as the Marine Hotel.

Norfolk Villa, the De Pass family home, stood on an estate that ran far up the mountainside. Mr. Alfred de Pass, who gave away a fortune in pictures to art galleries, was born there. His father sold the estate for twelve hundred pounds.

Bordeaux, a seafront mansion, was built in 1903 for Mr. Pieter Marais, a wine merchant. Sir Jacobus Graaff bought it some years later. Thousands knew Bordeaux as an hotel with panelled rooms, a wide stairway, Edwardian chandeliers, mosaic floors, many stained-glass windows, marble fireplaces and other signs of wealth. Some of the less bizarre furnishings were built into the entrance of the million-pound block of flats which replaced Bordeaux.

Graaff's Pool, originally a stone quarry, gained its world famous name when Sir Jacobus provided most of the money for blasting a channel in the rocks and building a wall. Other bathers subscribed one pound a head. According to legend, Sir Jacobus had a secret passage built so that he could walk unobserved in bathing costume from Bordeaux to the beach. Demolition men found evidence of a bricked-up tunnel when Bordeaux was pulled down. However, the truth is different. Sir Jacobus was afraid that his children would be run over while crossing the railway line. He asked for a subway, and when his request was turned down he started building the tunnel. Then

the subway was built, and the tunnel was abandoned.

It was in 1959 that Sea Point lost the Main Road landmark called Primrose Villa, one of the oldest houses in that road. The garden was bright with primroses in the middle of last century. Then the Dreyers arrived from Alphen, Constantia, and Mr. Dreyer produced fruit and vegetables. Weeping willows sheltered his quinces and pomegranates, figs and flowers. He grew bamboos for the lads who fished along the coast. His widow opened a school there in the eighteen-eighties, and many little Sea Pointers learnt their alphabets in those classrooms. Not until 1943 did Miss Corrie Dreyer close the

school which had won so much affection.

Trains and motor-cars and then modern architects shattered the tranquil suburb which was a paradise in the early days of the Marquards and Bams, Maskews and Greens, Darters and Brands and other Sea Point families. Some moved away in disgust. That brilliant editor, Charles Donovan of the Cape, started a lively controversy many years ago when he described Sea Point as "the crucible from which the gold of South African society flowed across Adderley Street to the southern suburbs, where the snobs settled." Donovan added: "The dross of society remained at Sea Point, of course." Many old Sea



Pointers wrote furiously to the *Cape* about that little insult.

Those old Sea Point families lived in closer touch with passing ships than the flat-dwellers of today. Many seafront houses had a flagstaff in the grounds, and families sent up their flags on special occasions. All had telescopes; they could tell you the names of many steamers and they flashed good-bye to ships departing.

Just about a century ago the barque *Prince Alfred* was passing Sea Point when a fine Newfoundland dog sighted a seabird and leapt overboard. That dog never caught up with the barque. It swam three miles to the shore and was adopted

by a Sea Point family. Everyone in the little suburb talked about the Newfoundland that night.

Horse Bay is a Sea Point place name which is never heard nowadays, and there are few left who could lead you to it. But this was the bay near the present pavilion where the tramway workers took their horses into the water. Boat Bay, alongside the pavilion, has seen fish landed and sold for centuries. But an old Sea Point industry that has vanished was lime-burning. You have to cross the bay to Blaauwberg Strand to see and smell the blue-black musselshells burnt in limekilns.

Sea Point was only a small village in the last decades of last century.

Open fields and pastures gave it a tranquil air. Children gathered wildflowers on the way to school. Up to 1875 there was only one shop in Sea Point, and bread came from Cape Town every day in a donkey cart driven by a blind man. He followed the tram track, which had exactly the same gauge as the wheels of his cart. Tram drivers, knowing his disability, whistled before they reached him.

Nearly everyone must have seen a famous old photograph showing the first horse-tram leaving Sea Point for Cape Town. The passengers, almost to a man, wore top hats. That was in 1863, the year the Alabama called. Some of the cars were double-deckers, with upper deck passengers sitting in two rows, back

to back. Tarpaulins were provided for rainy days.

The express tram, which took Sea Point people home to lunch, was a small single-decker. Hauled by the finest teams of horses, it travelled at breakneck speeds; often over twelve miles an hour. It had red plush upholstery.

Fatty Adams, a memorable character, drove the express tram, standing on the platform like a charioteer, but never using his whip. Several of the guards were Irishmen. Old residents have told me that riding in this car, with the four horses at the gallop, was an experience. It did not suit elderly travellers.

The ride cost a shilling each way in those good old days, so that everything has not gone up in price as we thought. Passengers bound for Sea Point joined the tram in Long Street, where there was a waiting-room with wooden benches. Many of them passed the time in Cole's cafe nearby.

Tramway sheds and stables at Sea Point were at the end of the main road, and Tramway Road grew up as a result of the service. The cottages of the coloured tramway workers stood in open veld. Drivers were coloured, ticket collectors were white.

As there was only one tram an hour, it did not pay to ignore the loud warning bell which rang half an

hour before each tram departed. It was a long time before fares were cut by half and the service ran every thirty minutes.

In those easy-going years the passenger waited for the tram anywhere he liked. There were no regular stops. Drivers showed great courtesy in waiting for people running down side streets to catch the trams. The descendants of an early driver named Wepener were still living in Tramway Road at the time of the tragic evacuation a few years ago.

Sea Point trams were a success from the start. Away back in January 1864 they carried ten thousand passengers, and the horses went on hauling them almost up to the end of

last century. When the first electric tram appeared on the run, an onlooker was heard to remark: “Good heavens, these English, to use lightning instead of horses – we will all be killed.”

The railway from Monument Station to Sea Point was opened by Harry Solomon, the oldest resident, in 1892. It started as a private line, three small coaches covering the distance in twenty minutes. That included stops at Ebenezer Road, Cycle Track, Pine Grove, Three Anchor Bay, Hall Road, Milton Road and Clarens Road. No doubt you remember the deviation along the edge of the rocks outside Rapallo, Triton Cottage, Trent House and Scheveningen, just before the train reached the Sea Point terminus.

Those early train passengers saw a wide sheet of water on Green Point Common, where canoe and sailing regattas were held, and where the chinchierinchees were among the great sights of the Cape. One summer the pleasure lake dried up, and the frogs drove people mad with their anxious croaking until the rains came. Golfers played round the lake, cows grazed there and children gathered mushrooms.

This line had the youngest stationmaster in South Africa at one period. He was Peter Wagner, aged eleven, who was in charge of Hall Road station. Peter lived near the station and spent a lot of his time admiring the locomotives. One day a director of the company offered him the stationmaster’s job at one pound

a week. This was really an economy measure, as the company was losing money and could not afford a grown-up official.

So Peter Wagner went into uniform, cleaned out the waiting-room, sold tickets, signalled each train into the station. In between trains he was often able to swim.

I doubt whether this pioneer railway would ever have paid its way, but the end was hastened by an accident at the Three Anchor Bay crossing. A leading Sea Point attorney, who was seriously injured, was awarded £3,000 damages. One day the passengers assembled on the tiny stations as usual, but were left stranded. The company had gone bankrupt.

However, the line was still there, and was sometimes used for sending coal to Camps Bay. The coal was transferred to a Camp's Bay tram, which came down Queen's Road along a forgotten branch line. No one ever understood why the coal was not taken straight to Camps Bay in one tram.

Sea Point recovered its railway service in 1905, when the Cape Government Railways took over the line. It was a great occasion. Seven hundred people surged through the barriers at Monument Station just before nine that morning.

“The scenery along the line is superb,” wrote one who travelled that day. “Rolling breakers dash

upon the bleak rocks. Leaving Sea Point, the passengers can view the bathing places, then the pretty villas present themselves and the lighthouses appear in regular order. Somerset Hospital, the Breakwater convict prison, the docks and shipping riding at anchor in Table Bay, the fish market, fishing boats and fishing smell, the Central Jetty and Van Riebeeck's statue-all these appeared to interest the passengers and render the comfortable journey more enjoyable."

Five hundred Sea Point school children were given a free ride to Cape Town and back, with free buns at Monument Station. "The train was crowded with the little heads of golden-haired girls and straw-hatted boys, all of whose

eyes, gleamed brightly with joy," wrote a reporter. "One little chap was heard to remark: 'Oh, I wish we could ride every day in the train – how jolly I should be!'"

At night those trains had to haul, behind the guard's van, a special coach with an oil engine and electric generator. That lit the whole train.

Twenty years passed, and the Sea Point line was electrified at great cost. Two years later there was another ceremony, when the line closed down. Twelve hundred staunch railway travellers crowded into the last train at Monument Station. That was the only Sea Point train that really paid its way. Black mourning bands were worn.

Crackers and detonators sounded all along the track. All the stations were crowded with mourners, and at Sea Point there was a huge wreath with a streamer: "In memory of the Sea Point line." Many last day travellers kept their tickets as souvenirs. Nearly one hundred railwaymen were transferred to other posts all over South Africa. One quarter of a million pounds had been lost.

I can still identify the last remaining masonry of the old Sea Point station as I walk past the aquarium. Sea Point has been transformed since I caught the train at that platform for Monument.

Three Anchor Bay lost its atmosphere when it was turned into a modern, concrete fishing harbour,

full of speed-boats and surrounded by flags and loudspeakers. I remember the place before World War I, when it was a natural bay with a white sandy bottom.

Two tidemarks stood in the bay, and a ship's anchor chain was cemented to a rock. A pump house supplied salt water for roadwork. In the boatsheds there gathered such famous old fishing enthusiasts as "Pa" Klerck, Bob Scott, John Daneel and P. T. Hansen.

Hansen was a Dane who had gone to sea at thirteen as galley boy in a sailing ship. His ship was dismasted off the Cape, and Hansen was injured and sent to hospital. When he recovered he stayed on in Cape Town as cook in the hospital. Then

he owned a second-hand dealer's shop in District Six, and also worked as a chimney-sweep.

Fishing was Hansen's hobby, and he was a tough skipper. Those who fished with him had to spend their Saturday afternoons netting crawfish bait; then, in the small hours of Sunday they put to sea and rowed for miles in search of fish. Such an expert was Hansen with hook and line that he was nicknamed the "Hottentot King."

Easter Monday was once the holiday when the Malays took over every beach on the Atlantic coast from Mouille Point to Camps Bay and beyond. Some walked all the way. Those who owned Cape carts, donkey carts or hansoms packed

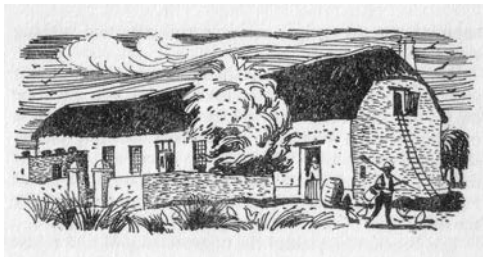
them with their families and friends. They danced to banjo and guitar and the little drums called ghommas. Old residents of Sea Point remember the aroma of these beach parties, compounded of shellfish and seaweed, fish and coconut oil, curry powder and coffee. In the evening they danced all the way home along the old Beach Road, and there were few ruthless motorcars to menace them.

High above Sea Point is the so called Huguenot Cross on a great rock-face of Lion's Head. Some say that Portuguese explorers worked on the rock to produce the cross; others prefer the Huguenot version.



There is a legend that runaway slaves hid in a cave in these rocks, and that their cruel master followed them and was killed. The cave and the skeletons, it is said, were found many years afterwards by men hunting porcupines.

Mr. Edward John Moore, a Cape Town solicitor and former Sea Point mayor, investigated a number of historical mysteries including this one. He declared that the vertical fissure was natural, but the horizontal part of the cross was man-made. This is really a Sea Point mystery that no one has solved.



## **Chapter Eighteen**

### **ALONG THE BEACH TO MILNERTON**

MILNERTON is a suburb which has been overlooked by the many historians of the Cape. Perhaps a famous homestead would have placed it on the literary map. As it is, Milnerton remained hidden and forgotten through the years in a wilderness of wattle.

Residents enjoy the story of a stranger in Adderley Street who asked the way to Milnerton. "Follow

the southeaster until you come to a place where the trees grow sideways and the people build their houses with the backs to the wind," he was told. "That's Milnerton".

Let me uncover Milnerton. This place, its wild life not yet driven out, has always attracted me. Certainly it has a background and a story, though it has waited long to be told. I like the approach along the last remnant of Woodstock beach; the last wrecks still jutting above the green shallows; the last coal from the ill-fated *Ryvingen* still coming ashore for poor children to gather on the sands. Coloured fishermen huddle in the lee of their open boats of the old design, mending trek-nets and making coffee.

Now you are on Paarden Eiland, and in the spring, if you turn your eyes away from the factories, you might be on the Darling coast. Arum lilies grow here, and sheets of white daisies. Within living memory, hunting parties shot quail on the island. Huge flocks of curlews fed in the marshes. Fishing boats entered the rivers that made Paarden Eiland a real island, and they netted harders by the thousand.

This beach, too, yielded the unexpected gifts and refuse of the sea. Beachcombers have found everything from a dead whale to barrels of wine and tins of olive oil.

It was soon after World War I that the first road to Milnerton was

made by convicts along the Paarden Eiland coast, too close to the sea. You can still drive on to the part of this old road which was not washed away.

Paarden Eiland was owned by the Mellish family years ago. Their homestead, white-walled and thatched, stood alone for years; then the factories closed in. They kept Clydesdale horses on the island, and Friesland cattle, and grew forage. Horses have grazed on this island for centuries, and there is no mystery about the name.

That great horseman Wolraad Woltemade is believed to have lived in the thatched farmhouse known as Rentzkies Farm on the edge of Paarden Eiland. You know

the old place? It stands opposite the former Heatherton station, where three lonely cottages were pulled down not so long ago. The old name of the farm was Kleinzuur, and some say it is the oldest farm in the Cape Peninsula.

Kleinzuur has walls three feet thick, and experts have recognised eighteenth-century craftsmanship in one of the window frames. Ceilings are heavily timbered. Small casement windows are set in deep embrasures, and there are green venetian shutters. In the kitchen there is an old-fashioned baking oven built into the side of the fireplace.

Nearly two centuries have passed since Woltemade plunged into the

surf on his horse and saved fourteen seamen from the *Jonge Thomas* before he was drowned. Many accounts have been written of the wreck and the rescue, but no record has been found linking Woltemade with the old Kleinzuur homestead. The story has been passed down from generation to generation, however, and it may be true. Mrs. van Reenen, who was living at Kleinzuur in recent years, heard the legend from her husband's parents. She said it was part of the history of the building.

Johann Rentzkie was a German who settled at the Cape in 1834 and bought Kleinzuur to breed horses and keep merino sheep. It became known as Rentzkie's from that time. The government bought the place

during a small-pox epidemic at the end of last century, and set up an isolation hospital there. One of the first telephone lines ran from Rentzkie's to the Old Town House, so that friends of patients could keep in touch without danger. It is still an isolation hospital with modern wards.

Milnerton is a new name, of course, and a report dated 1760 refers to the area as Jan Biesje's Kraal. But who was Jan Biesje? The archives have been searched for details of this person, but no one can say whether he lived, and if so whether he was a white farmer or a Hottentot chief. An old French map has it marked down as Jan Buisson's Kraal, but this is no help as no Buisson has been traced.

Theorists have suggested that Jan Biesje's Kraal was originally Janbieskraal. *Biese* are bulrushes, and Jan was some forgotten character who lived among the bulrushes. Alternatively, it was once Jongbeeskraal, where the young beasts were herded. Such corruptions often come about, but the name Jan Biesje's Kraal is so old that I am inclined to cling to it. I have an idea that the salt pan was more valuable than the young beasts.

Jan Biesje's Kraal was still a farm at the opening of this century. The homestead will be found in Knysna Road, and I have seen this described as "the original homestead, three hundred years old." That is certainly incorrect.

Von Buchenroder, the German writer, visited Jan Biesje's Kraal after the 1809 earthquake. He noted rents and fissures in the earth, and heard stories of jets of coloured water spurting from holes in the ground. Von Buchenroder specially mentioned the homestead, which had suffered so much that the owner had evacuated it. There were clefts in the walls. It was rent asunder.

Clearly the present homestead belongs to a period long after the earthquake, and might have been built fairly late last century. Like other farmhouses standing near the sea, it incorporates driftwood. Curved rafters in the kitchen ceiling came from a shipwreck, and

the double-door leading into the hall is of nautical pattern.

Milnerton grew up round the Jan Biesje's Kraal homestead. First the Cambridge Hotel very early this century, then a jarrahwood boat-house on the Diep River, and a few houses to encourage settlers. My 1904 guide mentions the completion of the railway, and declares: "When Milnerton is properly open we shall have a kind of Margate so far as the stretch of sandy beach is concerned, and it can be reached from town in twenty minutes or less for a few pence."

One day in April 1905 the railway passengers travelled free of charge to a great sale of plots. The train was crammed, and the sale brought

in nearly six thousand pounds. A sacred concert in the boating pavilion followed.

About this time the Western Province Rugby Union bought thirteen acres to be laid out as a football ground. One man built a double-storey house overlooking the field so that he could watch the game every Saturday free and in comfort. He was still there recently (at the age of eighty-eight) complaining that he had not seen a game yet.

Steam dredgers were brought to the Diep River in parts, assembled on the spot and launched. This was an expensive operation, but the dredgers pumped out hundreds of tons of sand every day and

prepared a regatta course two miles long. "The Diep River will be the cradle for many a famous oar," predicted the *Cape Argus*. But this hope was not realised. Every winter the river kept silting up; the boathouse was burnt down; a great deal of money was wasted. Finally the boating pavilion was turned into a school.

It was a discouraging outlook, for the syndicate had spent many thousands of pounds. They had provided seven miles of hard roads and planted thousands of blue gums, pines and wattles. (Too many wattles, possibly). And after all this effort there were only a couple of dozen houses.

Workmen digging gravel uncovered the foundations of an old building, said to have been a toll-house. Pennies with the head of George IV came to the surface.

One wise enterprise of Milnerton's early days was the park. It had a hall, known as the Casino, and the tearoom was called the Pagoda. Now the old Casino that never heard the click of roulette wheels is the hall where ratepayers hold their meetings.

Milnerton's wooden bridge was built during the South African War, and was probably intended as a link with the fort near the beach. It was condemned at various times, but the jarrah was still carrying the traffic safely in the nineteen-

sixties, when the new bridge was built farther up the river near the Ascot racecourse.

The suburb developed very slowly. Only a few houses appeared in the bush. Four trains ran every day for the few inhabitants; one to work, lunch-time trains, one in the evening. Two coaches were enough to carry the whole daily travelling population of the suburb. The line was carried on to the racecourse. Platforms and buildings of the terminus at Tygerberg can still be seen, but the last rusting rails were taken away a year or two ago.

I think it was the vast area of dense bush that made Milnerton unpopular as a residential suburb between the wars. Apart from



murderers, the bush sheltered many criminals and escaped convicts. Motorists would not stop at night.

When the bush was thinned out, when 'bus services were provided, when the housing shortage was felt after World War II, Milnerton began to develop at last. Now it is a town of a thousand homes. Jan Biesje's Kraal is becoming a new Cape Town on the far side of Table Bay.

Some of the bush is still there, and beyond the settled part of the suburb it still provides a living for hard-working woodcutters. Who uses firewood nowadays? Poor people on the Cape Flats, and others beyond the power lines. These people see the wild life that

survives on the edge of the city: the buck and game birds and the snakes.

Jan Biesje's Kraal farm used to stretch all the way from Paarden Eiland to the crossroads now known as Killarney. The adjoining farm, to the north, was Vaderlandsche Rietvlei, granted in 1813 to John Frederick Kirsten and V. A. Schonberg. Through these farms runs the Diep River, a river of genuine beauty at certain times of the year.

Diep River was marked on some maps as Visser's Hok River, and in the seventeenth century it was the Zout River. The river rises in the Malmesbury hills, and flows past many old grain farms. Visser's Hok

was the Dutch East India Company's cattle station, fourteen miles from Cape Town.

It has often been stated that small vessels or grain barges used to sail up the Diep River from Table Bay and load farm produce at Visser's Hok. If they did so, they were very small craft, for nothing larger than a canoe can pass through the shallow channels nowadays.

Van Riebeeck thought he had found a navigable river in this stream. He called it the "Hollants Rietbeecq" in his diary, because the reeds that grew there were like those of Holland. On January 29, 1659 he wrote: "At its mouth this river is dry at present, but in the rainy season it flows strongly into the

large salt-pans above the wreck of the *Haarlem* at the tail of the Leopard Mountain (Tygerberg) and then from there, through the pans, into the Salt River... In the rainy season probably even these salt-pans would be navigable, though they are at present dry at the mouth of the Hollants Rietbeecq. Such boats could then go right inland and could at any rate fetch salt from these pans."

Milnerton lagoon, as it is called, is the broad stretch of the Diep River before it reaches its blind mouth. Jan Biesje's Kraal had its salt pans, and once a salt contractor lived there. Riet Vlei was the "Zout Pan" of Van Riebeeck's day. Visser's Hok was named as far back as 1666, after a free farmer, Hendrik

Visser, who grazed sheep and cattle there.

Visser killed a rhinoceros on his farm and he was carrying the meat and hide on small wagons to the farm next day when he had an adventure. "All of a sudden they were surrounded by four frightful lions," says an account in the archives. "Thank God, they suffered no injury. Only two oxen of each wagon had been grievously bitten, but the others, becoming unyoked, managed to escape."

You will still discover an abundance of bird life in this area, wild duck and pelicans along the river, coot hooting in the wattle, spurwing geese, secretary birds and a great variety of migrants on the

vlei. But the mammals are not so interesting as they were in Visser's day. I have seen nothing more dangerous than a polecat. Nevertheless there are still a few buck, and as recently as March 1963 a poacher was fined R400.

Every week I drive through Milnerton several times on my way to walk on Blaauwberg beach. The whole journey from Cape Town now takes twenty minutes. Forty years ago the Blaauwberg Strand visitor might travel by train to Tygerberg station, and transfer to a Cape cart. Some drivers crossed the river at Killarney. Others took a short cut through the veld from Tygerberg, dodging the branches of trees, jolting over a little-known track amid the scent of turf and

wattles and heather. As the cart passed through the shallows of Riet Vlei, the wheels crushed the waxen, fragrant petals of *wateruintjies*. There the flamingos rested after their meals of frogs and fish.

Presently the duikers and gulls of the coast would appear, and the cart would move slowly in deep ruts past the dunes. Blaauwberg Strand was described to me by someone who knew it at that time as a place with the charm of utter isolation, more primitive than the smallest karoo dorp. Some people travelled from Maitland to Blaauwberg by ox-wagon, and a team of twenty oxen took six hours. In the spring, the wagon would be deep in wildflowers by the time Blaauwberg was reached.

Blaauwberg is within minutes of Milnerton now. The rhinos and lions of Hendrik Visser's day have disappeared, I hope that progress does not destroy all the wild flowers and drive away all the wild duck and coot along that memorable drive to Milnerton and beyond.

## **Chapter Nineteen**

### **THEY DIED ON GALLOWS HILL**

THAT envelope I found at the back of my 1904 guide contained a reproduction of a panorama of Cape Town by Lady Anne Barnard. Just outside the Castle (where Lady Anne lived) she had painted the walled enclosure that framed the gallows and other instruments of torture. Another picture from an earlier period was marked with crosses showing three places of execution: the Castle, the hillock opposite the Amsterdam Battery, and the “outside place of execution” at Green Point. I also found a photograph of the handsome Anreith building in Buitenkant Street, once a police court where I started work as a reporter. The caption read: “This

building was erected on the site of a former place of execution”.

Cape Town, with its several Tyburns, watched far too many executions and scenes of torture in the old days. They were still hanging men and women in public less than a century ago. The medieval punishment lingers on painfully in our own time. Sentence of death was a horror that I heard all too often as a young reporter. And I am recalling the ghastly cavalcade of executioners now in the hope that public opinion in all countries will move one day against this whole disreputable procedure.

Van Riebeeck had been at the Cape for only a few months when he noted that men were sleeping on guard

duty. "Thieving, roguery and other dirty malpractices among the common people are so much on the increase that nothing of the Company's property can be entrusted to anyone, not even the sentries," he wrote. "Hence to prevent such crime we have appointed a provost-marshal to act when required as executioner, with a view to instilling a little more fear into the common people." Michiel Gleve, the executioner, was stated to have been a "capable man" who accepted the office of his own free will. The salary was fifteen guilders a month, plus other emoluments paid by the Company to their executioners in other colonies. Gleve had himself received one hundred lashes for fighting, so that he was not entirely

without experience. His first task was to scourge one Jan Pietersz, a sentry who had stolen copper from a company's wheelbarrow.

Some murderers were hanged, others were shot in those early days of the Cape settlement. Five mutineers from the ship *Het Huys te Velsen* of Amsterdam were hanged, while seven others were lashed and branded. Susanna, a slave girl from Bengal, convicted of strangling her baby (which was suffering from smallpox) was tied in a sack and thrown into the sea.

Mutineers were sometimes allowed to draw lots for life or death. Those who escaped hanging had to stand under the gallows with ropes round their necks watching the execution

of their shipmates. Then they were flogged and kept in chains while serving long prison sentences.

Executions came as a relief from boredom. For example, the Company's diarist recorded the hanging of Jan Nielse of Stockholm, a deserter, in 1673, and added: "A northerly breeze afforded a pleasant day's weather for it."

Four Hottentots of the Gonnema clan were arrested at that period for murdering members of the Dutch garrison at Saldanha. They were handed over to a friendly Hottentot captain who had the murderers "beaten to death and trampled underfoot". After the bodies had been flung into the sea, the

Hottentot executioners were rewarded with arrack and tobacco.

Captain Hendrik Verbeek, who had killed someone during a quarrel, was "shot by arquebusquade," a primitive gun firing a bullet.

Although the population was small, murderers were not always caught. Thus, in September 1700, the whole garrison was mustered to discover the murderer of the corporal of the ship *General Vrede*. The body had been found "beyond the houses below Lion's Hill." Possibly the murderer found a berth in a passing ship. Some years later the sick visitor of the ship *Amsterdam* went on shore. He was "cruelly murdered in the night, the pockets of his trousers ripped open,

and he was left lying in the street". Again no arrest was made.

Descriptions of people "broken on the wheel" appear in the Cape records early in the eighteenth century. The wheel was really a cross lying flat on the ground, and the victim was tied to it. Sometimes the executioner started with the "mercy stroke", a heavy blow on the chest which usually burst the heart and caused a quick death. Certain criminals, however, were "broken from below up", which meant that first the legs and then the arms were broken. After that they were strangled.

Executions were accompanied by a great deal of ceremonial in the seventeenth century. The secretary

to the Court of Justice read the sentences from the Kat balcony at the Castle. Then a procession formed, led by members of the Court of Justice, the court messenger and a clergyman. Condemned persons were brought up from the dungeons and surrounded by a company of pikemen, while two companies of musketeers kept the crowd at the right distance. They marched out of the Castle slowly, band playing.

If the execution was to be held on the Buitenkant site which I have mentioned, the procession had not far to go. Members of the Court of Justice sat on a dais. Bodies were removed to the Amsterdam Battery site and hung in chains as a warning.



Andrew Sparrman, the Swedish botanist, remarked that the gallows at the “outside place” were the largest he had seen in any country, “a sufficiently wide door to eternity, though by no means too large for the purpose of a tyrannical government”.

Another traveller of this period wrote: “As the ship entered Table Bay we noticed to our right a small hill which bore three frowning gallows. I came to the conclusion that they were meant as a warning to arriving strangers not to outrage the law of the country; otherwise the new arrival might meet a disgraceful death beneath these beams.”

Gallows Hill, it seems from various accounts, was about forty feet high and paved with flagstones. Long after the gallows had been removed, the flagstones remained. The hill gradually disappeared because of the demand by builders for the sandstone and white sand of which it was composed. Sailors and beachcombers haunted the neighbourhood. They were known as “sandcarriers” because they sometimes raised the price of a sherry by carrying sacks of sand from Gallows Hill to the taverns. The sand was strewn on the floors.

Incendiarists were usually burned alive in the seventeenth century. Slaves almost succeeded in destroying the thatched Cape Town of 1736, but the ringleaders were

caught and imprisoned in the Castle to await trial. Three committed suicide with a knife passed to them by a friend. The governor was annoyed by this evasion of justice, and ordered three remaining slaves to be impaled. This was the most diabolical punishment of all; it meant that the victims lingered on in agony for as long as four days. Occasionally their friends were able to visit them at night and put them to death.

Executioners were never popular, and one man complained to the Dutch East India Company that he had often been threatened with assault. For that reason he was unable to find an assistant. The company then published a scale of payments, evidently with the idea

of attracting a suitable assistant. Fees were laid down for breaking limbs, pinching with hot tongs, burning, decapitating, hanging, strangling, scorching, quartering and hanging up the pieces, torturing and chopping off hands. Strangling was carried out slowly, with periods for recovery when questions were put.

Slaves were often tortured to extract confessions. Their hands were tied behind their backs and the rope, which passed over a pulley in the ceiling, was drawn taut. As the feet were raised from the ground, weights were suspended from the big toes. "Full torture" meant weights of fifty pounds each.

Those who were put to death by the sword were the fortunate ones. It was not often that this form of execution was ordered, but the double-edged sword may be seen in the museum in Cape Town.

Lord Macartney put an end to all forms of torture except hanging during the first British occupation of the Cape. This meant a great reduction in work (and income) for the public executioners. One hangman applied in despair for a small pension. His assistant hanged himself.

You may wonder whether I am correct in referring to hanging as a form of torture. In the days before the drop was introduced, hanging always meant slow strangulation.

There is abundant evidence in South Africa and elsewhere that modern hangings are sometimes bungled and that death is not always instantaneous.

Let me continue the grim story of an era which has not yet ended. No more victims were broken on the wheel, but the tumbrils still left the Tronk in the Heerengracht for Gallows Hill. A woman who had murdered her child was executed in public there in 1837; and four years later Maria Holt, who had drowned her baby, was hanged there.

Here is a shameful scene reported by the Cape Argus on May 29, 1858 when a Malay named Sedien was hanged at Gallows Hill: "The authorities, believing in the efficacy

of public executions, took care to make this spectacle as public as possible. The gallows were erected a day or two beforehand. Hundreds of children visited the hill.

“Nothing could have been more clumsily managed. After the poor wretch had put himself into position to have the noose placed round his neck it was found that the rope was too short. There was a delay of several minutes. The executioner adjusted the rope. Then it was found that the knot was not properly placed. The poor wretch was struggling and plunging violently. Altogether it took the executioner ten minutes to slip the knot down to the proper place. It is said that the executioner, a German named Witt, was paid twenty pounds for the job

which was done ‘for the good of society’.”

When Roeland Street gaol was opened in 1859, some executions were held in front of the gaol. Thus in 1862 the *Cape Argus* reported the hanging of Jephtha Thys in the presence of police, soldiers and a large crowd. Seven years later two Bushmen were brought from Namaqualand to be hanged. A gun was fired at the moment of execution. People in the crowded street joked and laughed. It was said that the Bushmen were shown their coffins and were so delighted with the handsome boxes that they marched happily to the gallows.

Thoughtless people declare that hanging is a deterrent to murder.

Study the behaviour of the crowds who watch public executions and you find no signs of such an influence. Only those sensitive people who are close to the condemned person, the doctors, clergymen and others, feel the shock of an execution severely.

Gallows Hill was used for public executions even after the Roeland Street gaol had been built. I remember in 1934 the late Senator Munnik (oldest Member of Parliament at the time) telling me how he missed a day's school in the eighteen-sixties to watch an execution. "There was no bungling that day," recalled Senator Munnik. "The condemned man arrived in a scotch-cart. The tail-board was dropped and the hangman stepped

on to the cart, pinioned the man, put the noose round his neck, stepped off the cart and led the horse away. There was no struggle. The man's neck was broken. The hangman wore a top-hat, dark glasses and a long, white false beard, but I think everyone knew his name."

Now here is another Gallows Hill hanging recalled by the *Cape Argus* in its centenary supplement in 1957. The victim, one O'Brien, complained when brought to the scaffold that it was not properly constructed to hang a man. A change was made in the arrangement, unskilfully as it turned out. O'Brien was placed on the drop, and when it fell he swung for a time but fell before he was dead. The apparatus

had given way, and a sailor in the crowd jumped up and cut the rope round O'Brien's neck. O'Brien, stupefied, was removed to a tent until the gallows had been rearranged. Another rope was procured and he was then "launched into eternity".

Only in 1869 did the Cape Parliament pass an act ordering private executions. Mr. William Porter, attorney-general and a fine parliamentary character, said that the law did not go far enough. He hoped to see the abolition of capital punishment. The Cape Argus supported him, but though a century has passed that merciful step has still to be taken.

Roeland Street was the execution centre of Cape Town from 1870 to

1935. One morning in 1919 the public executioner, Max Kriel, hanged eight natives. They were members of the Ninevite gang which had committed acts of violence at the Kimberley convict station. Newspaper reports stated that the hangings were carried out "very expeditiously, in batches of four".

Executions, as I have said, are not always very expeditious. I have read an official report by a magistrate, Mr. Rose Innes, into a painful episode early this century. John Galeni, a native, was hanged in the usual way, but after the drop he showed signs of life. He was unstrapped, and there was a struggle. The executioner (reported Mr. Rose Innes) then rushed up to the scaffold, hauled Galeni up by the rope, and re-

dropped him three or more times until he died.

The report censured the deputy-sheriff for failing to give details of the episode at the inquest. Mr. Rose Innes also recommended that a more experienced man should be engaged as executioner, and that gallows of a new pattern, such as those used in England, should be installed.

Prison officials cannot enter into the controversy over capital punishment, but such views as they have uttered are of interest. An experienced prison officer recently pointed out that executions should be carried out “with decency and dispatch by an executioner of steady nerve, discreet in his demeanour”.

A minister of the Dutch Reformed Church who had spent two years attending people under sentence of death gave his impressions of the last moments. He shook hands with the condemned men in a room next to the gallows room. “We ministers have to bite on our teeth to keep back the tears,” he declared. “Then the hands are tied, white cowls placed over the heads of the doomed men. The chaplains remain singing hymns to give the men courage while they are taken to the gallows. There are no screams or shouts, only dull sounds. Then everything is deathly quiet. After that you stagger to a hard bench in the corner and sob your soul out.”

Roeland Street has no gallows now. Years ago a director of prisons

ordered the removal of the timber and the trapdoor. The concrete was filled in. Morbid curiosity may no longer be satisfied.

But the old condemned cell is there. Once I heard a first-hand story of life in the death-cell, told by a man who had spent six weeks there in the shadow of the gallows. Fred Potter was his name.

Potter had suspected his wife of having an affair with another man. He had gone to the old Tivoli bar in Cape Town just as they were putting out the lights, and there he saw a man with his wife. In the darkness he mistook the man for his rival. First he shot his wife dead, then he wounded the man, and finally he ran

up Plein Street trying to shoot himself.

One shot grazed his head and went through his hat. Still running, Potter pulled the trigger again. The revolver jammed. And at that moment a policeman arrested him.

Potter was sentenced to death. "You learn how much life means to you when every day seems to be taking you closer to the gallows," Potter told me with a shiver many years afterwards.

He remembered every detail, of course. The tiny cell, eight feet by six. The daily meal of curry and rice, which the gaol staff regarded as a special treat for a doomed man. The books, the hour's exercise in the gaol yard every evening when



the other prisoners had been locked up for the night. The execution of another murderer who had been living in an adjoining cell. The slam of the heavy doors as the trap was sprung.

Bishop Lavis visited Potter, and promised him that he would interview Lord Buxton, the new Governor-General, and ask for a reprieve. Every day a clergyman read psalms in the cell. Potter's sisters were allowed to see him, and urged him not to give up hope. But there came a day when he thought he was kissing them good-bye for the last time. Potter had almost made up his mind that he would have to face the hangman when he was informed that the

death sentence had been commuted to imprisonment for life.

So he crossed over to Robben Island in the old *Pieter Faure* just after the outbreak of World War I. In those easy going days, white convicts were allowed to wear ordinary civilian clothes. Once on the island, well-behaved men were allowed a great deal of liberty. "After the condemned cell, I found in the beginning that I was almost enjoying myself," confided Potter. "I was thirty-two years old. Sometimes I wondered whether I would ever see the mainland again. I could see my former home on the Signal Hill slopes, but it seemed a long way away."

Convicts were allowed to swim from the beach; in fact, sea bathing was compulsory. Some of the men used to tease the warders by swimming far out in the direction of fishing-boats. They liked to hear the warders shouting anxiously for them to swim back.

After a short spell in the slate quarry Potter was put to work in the kitchen. He assisted a dangerous criminal named Brown, who had escaped from the island not long before in a dinghy with another man. The other man parted company with Brown, committed a murder, and was hanged. Brown was rounded up and returned to the island with a longer sentence. And there he was teaching Potter the art of cookery.

Potter became expert, and before long he found himself appointed as the warders' chef. He also played the organ in church every Sunday. There was a small fee attached to this post, and Potter saved twenty-one pounds while he was on the island.

Many murderers and other desperate characters were sent to Robben Island, and there were occasional violent interludes. Yet the impression Potter carried away with him was of a peaceful island with manitoka hedges, wild sandy wastes outside the settlement, the cattle and sheep, goats and white-tailed rabbits, and the leper women sitting with their sewing on benches along the beach. In the spring it was fragrant with a golden

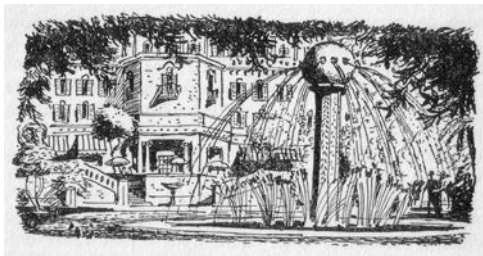
carpet of wild flowers; oxalis and arum lilies came up everywhere, and partridges flew over the fields.

After ten years on the island Potter found himself back in Cape Town. On that first day of freedom he met an old friend, and they went to the races. They entered the bar, and the barman stared at Potter and fainted. Fred Johnson, the barman, was the man Potter had shot and wounded by mistake that night outside the Tivoli.

Potter found work almost at once. He died in 1952, one of the many tragic characters who spent years of their lives in the solitude of Robben Island. I always think of Potter as an example of a murderer who became a useful member of society.

Some who are reprieved should spend their lives in prison or criminal lunatic asylums; but none should go to the gallows.

The gallows belong to the years of torture; the era when Michiel Glevé was expected to instil “a little fear into the common people;” the barbarous period of breaking on the wheel, impaling and burning alive.



## **Chapter Twenty**

### **SCANDAL AT CHRISTMAS**

CAN there be any old or middle-aged person who has lived for years in Cape Town without hearing some mention of a “tarring and feathering” episode at the Mount Nelson Hotel? The victim was known as “Matilda Chiffon,” and the affair occurred early on Christmas morning in 1901.

I hasten to add that the unhappy “Matilda” was not tarred and feathered, but the assault was grave and cruel. Nothing appeared in the

newspapers at the time, and for some reason the court proceedings that followed the assault were not reported. Hence the inaccurate rumours.

I was shown the Supreme Court record of this extraordinary scandal not long ago, and I found the sequel in the debates of the House of Commons in London. For this was a scandal with repercussions that echoed round the world. No ordinary assault I assure you.

Should I revive the old story? I can see no harm, now that all concerned have passed from the scene, in telling the truth of the matter for the first time.

“Matilda Chiffon” was the nickname of Hardwicke Foster

Stanford, a journalist of sorts. Stanford was also a homosexual. These somewhat difficult people probably receive more sympathy and understanding nowadays than they did early in the century.

“The trouble about homosexuals is that they believe they are better than normal people,” wrote a famous police chief in his textbook on crime. I think that description fitted Stanford. On the one occasion when I met him he left the unpleasant impression of a snob.

He was not the effeminate type of homosexual. Many are not, and I believe that at one time Oscar Wilde could knock out most men of his own weight. Stanford was tall,

slender, with *pince-nez* and a military moustache. Certainly he was no fool, though I understand that he preferred the life of a “remittance man” to regular work.

It was in the early eighteen-nineties that Stanford arrived in South Africa from England. He settled on the Reef at first and found a post at the Brakpan colliery. Later he was employed by the Star to write police court reports by day and attend social engagements at night. Stanford contributed what were known in those days as “Ladies’ Letters”. He liked describing dresses and that sort of thing.

Some hosts and hostesses thought Stanford was charming and he was entertained in the most fashionable

homes in Johannesburg. Often he went as a representative of the newspaper, but he was also present at many parties in his personal capacity. Stanford, unfortunately, was not satisfied with this social round. He took offence if he was not invited to every important party or dance, and became a notorious gate-crasher. This failing was to be Stanford's undoing.

Stanford served in the Mine Guard for a time during the South African War, but he was invalided out after attacks of enteric and dysentery. Then he moved down to Cape Town, where he sent news to the Cape Argus on a freelance basis. He continued to wear khaki. Probably he had been granted war correspondent status and was permitted to do so.

The change of air made no difference to Stanford's habit of intruding at private parties. Clearly he thought that he was good enough to dispense with invitations. He lived at Newlands, but his favourite haunt was the Mount Nelson Hotel. The splendid Mount Nelson had only been open for about three years, and the most senior British Army officers, Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener, often stayed there. A person of Stanford's temperament could hardly keep away from such a place. Many guests had titles. And apparently Stanford felt that he was better than any of them.

Just before Christmas in 1901 the Mount Nelson guests included Colonel Cooper, the base commandant, and a number of young

officers on leave from units serving in the field. Captain Williams of the Third Dragoon Guards appears to have been the ringleader in the Christmas morning affair; others who took part were Captain J. H. Hayes of the Dragoons; Captain Walter Judkins of the Imperial Yeomanry; three lieutenants in the Twelfth Lancers named Lawrence Prior, C. M. Truman and Cecil Fane; a Lieut. R. H. Hermon-Hodge and Lieut. F. C. Belson. Mr. Charles Herbert Barclay, a Johannesburg stockbroker, was also present.

The officers had organised a private dance for Christmas Eve. Suspecting that Stanford would appear as an uninvited guest, they warned him against forcing his company on them. Very foolishly Stanford

ignored the warning, annoying the officers and their guests. Stanford was warned again, but refused to leave until the end of the dance.

Came midnight, the dance ended and the ladies departed. Soon afterwards Stanford was conducted to Lieut. Prior's room to be tried by "Subalterns' court-martial". Lieut. Fane presided, and Captain Williams was instructed to defend Stanford. Not surprisingly, the mock court returned a verdict of guilty.

Only those who were present knew exactly what occurred in Prior's room between midnight and daybreak. Later there was a conflict of evidence. Nevertheless, it is clear from the court record that Stanford was brutally assaulted.

Stanford struggled. He told his tormentors that it was caddish for ten men to set on one. He offered to fight them one at a time, but this challenge does not seem to have been accepted.

In his statement to the court Stanford alleged that he was completely undressed and dealt a number of heavy blows with a stick. He fainted. Brandy was then forced into his mouth and smoke was blown into his face. Part of his moustache was cut off. He was compelled to sign a document but was not allowed to read the contents. When daylight came he was made to lie naked on a sofa, where he was “decorated” with flowers and photographed. Then he was given a dressing-gown, taken

out to the terrace and thrown into the pond below the fountain. It was now full daylight, and he was photographed again. Stanford made other more serious allegations which were denied by the defendants.

Evidence was taken from Mr. Barclay, the stockbroker, in Johannesburg. Barclay was inclined to laugh off the whole affair as ordinary horseplay and ragging. He said Stanford was “rapped” with a stick and pretended to faint. Stanford had not been compelled to sign anything, but “influence” had been used. Barclay added: “Stanford forced himself on people, and his behaviour warranted severe punishment”.



Stanford had sued Captain Williams and the other officers for three thousand pounds damages for assault and costs. When the case came before Sir J. H. de Villiers and a special jury in Cape Town early in 1902, the defendants tendered twenty-five pounds and costs. Not one of them appeared, for they had all returned to their units in the field and pleaded that as they were on active service it was impossible for them to give evidence. Letters and telegrams were handed in, and the defendants were supported in this attitude by their commanding officers.

Advocates Schreiner and Beauclerk Upington, appearing for Stanford, were successful in having the hearing set down for May 7, 1902, in

spite of protests by Advocate Searle, K.C. for the defendants. Stanford's counsel put in an affidavit by Agnes Sarah Wakefield, who declared that two of the defendants had boasted to her that the trial would never come off. They said that martial law was supreme, and that Lord Kitchener would stop the proceedings. The case would be postponed until they had slipped off to England. So the court ruled that the defendants had not done their best to appear, and the trial went on.

It was alleged that after the assaults, Captain Williams had threatened Stanford as follows: "I will not stop at anything, I have made up my mind to finish you off tonight. I have now made it impossible for any lady ever to speak to you again, and I shall

make it my business to spread what has happened to you from one end of the service to the other so that you will be cut by everyone”.

Stanford said that apparently Williams had put this threat into force. It would be impossible to remove the slur on his name until after the trial.

Sir J. H. de Villiers, chief justice, made this comment: “If the statement in Stanford’s declaration is true, this is the most scandalous case I have ever heard”.

Advocate Upington argued that Stanford had been very seriously injured, he had been deprived of many of his friends, and had had no opportunity of putting his side of the case forward.

Apparently the court reached its verdict mainly on the strength of the evidence taken in Johannesburg and various affidavits, as the defendants never appeared.

One of Stanford’s former employers in Johannesburg stated that Stanford was a man of good social standing, decent and presentable. His treatment at the Mount Nelson had had a damaging effect.

Mr. Harry Stonestreet, a Johannesburg solicitor, gave evidence that he had known Stanford since he was three months’ old. Stanford was highly respectable and went to the best houses in Johannesburg. He was not very robust, however, and preferred tea to alcohol.

Finally, the defendants apologised to Stanford and agreed to judgment against them for fifteen hundred pounds and costs. Photographs of Stanford in the pond, which had been circulated to ridicule him, were returned (with the negatives), except some prints which could not be recovered. The document Stanford had signed never came to light as it had been destroyed before the trial.

Months passed, and then a correspondent who signed himself "Veritas" wrote to the *Cape Times* re-opening this peculiar episode. Only a small sum of the fifteen hundred pounds damages had been paid, he said, as several of the culprits had refused to pay their share. "Veritas" alleged that

Colonel Cooper, the base commandant, had "failed to administer justice and due punishment to the young miscreants who had nearly killed Stanford".

Meanwhile the affair had reached the House of Commons in London. Mr. Swift Macneill (Donegal South) asked the Secretary of State for War whether he had inquired into the Mount Nelson incident, and, if so, with what result.

The reply was that full inquiries were being made, but the officers concerned were now stationed in various parts of the world. Letters had been sent as the matter could not be dealt with by cable. Replies had not yet been received.

Mr. Macneill asked later whether the Secretary of State for War was aware that Colonel Cooper, base commandant, was living at the Mount Nelson at the time of the assault. He wanted to know why Colonel Cooper had not stopped the attack. Had the affair been reported to Lord Kitchener? Why was the report of the legal proceedings excluded from the Cape newspapers? Why were the apologies of the officers not allowed to appear in the Cape newspapers? Was this due to action by the Military Censor?

Mr. Macneill was assured that these matters were being inquired into. I have studied the reports of the parliamentary debates in 1903 very carefully, but cannot trace any straightforward answers to these

questions. It is clear, however, that Stanford had influential and persistent friends in England. They did not allow the matter to rest.

During a later debate Mr. Macneill pointed out that Lord Kitchener was in England. Would he comment?

“I have perfect confidence in Lord Kitchener, and I am sure that, if necessary, he has dealt with the matter,” replied the Secretary of State. “A great many of these stories from South Africa are without foundation. Very serious charges have been made but this may be one that will bear explanation. It may have been exaggerated.”

Mr. Macneill stuck to his guns. Pressure mounted as the London newspapers joined in the outcry. At

last Mr. Macneill was informed that Lord Kitchener had ordered a court-martial, as it was desirable that the officers should have the opportunity of clearing their names. Colonel Cooper (the reply went on) was not involved, as he did not hear of the matter until later.

Seven officers, including Captain Williams, were summoned to London from India and other far garrisons. Mr. Macneill then wanted to know whether two of the officers under arrest, having given their word not to attend places of amusement, had been seen at Ascot races. It was admitted that there had been a breach of parole and that disciplinary action had been taken.

There was a mild scene in the House of Commons when Mr. Macneill asked whether Captain Williams had been promoted to the rank of major. The Secretary of State said that he refused to be cross-examined. Mr. Speaker called for order,

A shrewd thrust was delivered by Mr. Macneill when he asked whether the court-martial would be open to the public and the Press. No satisfactory reply was given. There was widespread astonishment and disapproval when it was announced later that the court-martial had been held and all the officers had been acquitted. The court-martial proceedings were never published. Stanford never received the balance of the damages and costs awarded to him in Cape Town.

A few examples of the London comment were cabled to South Africa by Reuter. The *Evening Standard* declared that the whole transaction was discreditable. "Raggers must be given to understand that the King's uniform must not be permitted to cover acts of ruffianism. Another newspaper remarked: "The question of Mr. Stanford's character forms no palliation for the assault." And the *Globe* pointed out that the court-martial should have been held in South Africa.

The curse uttered by Captain Williams on that unhappy Christmas morning of 1902 seems to have followed poor "Matilda Chiffon" throughout his life. He was always known, by sidelong glances and

whispers, as "the man who was tarred and feathered at the Mount Nelson during the Boer War".

I think this was a supreme example of the need for publicity in court proceedings. The newspapers in Cape Town probably acting on a hint or ban by the Military Censor, never gave proper reports of the trial. This was indeed a discreditable transaction. Justice of a sort was done, but it was not seen to be done. So the false rumours linger to this day.

Stanford spent most of his life in South Africa, followed by these rumours, contributing to newspapers, taking part in theatrical ventures and organising tours for concert artists. In his old age, after World War II, he

received undesirable publicity for the second time, when the newspapers reported that he had been convicted and fined for an unsavoury offence.

He went to England after that. Some legacy must have come his way, for he gave large parties at one of London's most expensive hotels. There were always a number of titled guests.

## Chapter Twenty-One

### THE WICKED YEARS

WARS bring out all sorts of wickedness. Old men who knew Cape Town at the turn of the century have assured me that it was one of the wickedest ports in the world. I doubt very much whether they were right, but the almost incredible scenes they described are certainly unknown in the far larger Cape Town of today.

Every city has its Christine Keeler periods when the vice that flourishes underground comes to the surface to shock unsuspecting citizens. Almost a century ago the *Cape Argus* reported that Primrose Square, off Harrington Street, was “the constant scene of a saturnalia

of prostitutes and thieves of the worst description”. That was a local eyesore. Towards the end of the century, however, the shebeens, gambling hells and disorderly houses spread over a much wider area and finally aroused public opinion to a degree which has not been reached again since then.

In those days it was no offence to run gambling saloons or brothels as long as they were not conducted in such a manner as to disturb the neighbours. Of course they did annoy the neighbours from time to time, but only on such occasions could the police secure convictions.

One day in 1895 the *Cape Argus* reported a number of police raids. “Slowly and surely the worst of



these dens are being weeded out,” said the newspaper. “Today six women were charged with allowing their houses to be used as brothels, so as to become disorderly and a public nuisance. Each woman was fined ten pounds or two months.”

Johannesburg at that time had nearly three hundred brothels. I mention the fact because of its bearing on the position in Cape Town a few years later.

Typical of the outlook of some criminals in Cape Town was a statement by George Terry, an Englishman born in France. Terry was charged in 1899 with living on the proceeds of prostitution. “I am surprised at this,” Terry said when arrested. “You know this is one of

the best conducted houses in Cape Town. I have no money now, because I paid fifty pounds for that little girl you saw in the kitchen. The other girl I bought in Johannesburg for one hundred pounds.” Terry pleaded guilty and was fined twenty pounds or three months – the maximum penalty in those days.

One of the witnesses in a similar case in 1901 stated that there were seventeen hundred prostitutes in Cape Town. The municipality had received fifteen hundred pounds in fines from brothel-keepers during the previous year.

Cape Town, it should be noted, was then one of a number of separate municipalities in the Cape Peninsula, and the Cape Town area stopped at

the Toll Gate in one direction and Boundary Road, Green Point, in the other. The city area was also the most troublesome area, though it would have been possible to find similar conditions at Simonstown.

Many refugees from other parts of South Africa were living in the Peninsula. Hundreds of women, known as “Continental”, had left Johannesburg owing to the war and were now plying their trade in Cape Town. Green Point Common was one large camp, with so many bad characters that few ordinary citizens dared to pass the outskirts at night. Those who took the risk were often sandbagged and robbed.

Gambling saloons catered for all sorts of dubious characters. A former

municipal official who had to visit low dives in the course of his duty told me that the leading gambling resort was the place known later as the Oddfellows Hall in Plein Street. “Free concert”, announced a board outside, and this was provided by a coloured band. However, gambling was the real purpose: roulette, crown and anchor and faro. Fights occurred every night, as there were thieves round the tables eager to lay hands on a soldier’s winnings.

Toughest spot in the city at that period was a saloon in a warehouse near St. Andrew’s Church. Australian soldiers in camp on the Common patronised this place. No one robbed the Australians; they could defeat any band of thugs. But this saloon became too lively, and

after a murder had been committed, Inspector Easton of the C.L.D., was able to have the den closed down.

Gambling was not confined to the saloons. You could lose your money easily enough on the Parade, where thimble-riggers and performers of the three-card trick made their precarious incomes. St. George's Street was the home of the bookmakers, and they had boards in the street showing the odds.

Cape Town's first music-hall opened its doors at this period. Known as the Pekin Theatre of Varieties, it was fully licensed. A man who later became wealthy acted as call boy and married one of the best singers. Tivoli per-

formances in later years must have seemed rather sedate to those who remembered the rowdy Pekin; for the soldiers on leave spent their pay on beer and brandy, and found plenty of feminine company to share their drinks. The whole audience roared the choruses of such old tearjerkers as "Break the News to Mother" and "Sing Us One of the Old Songs".

Just opposite the Pekin in Mostert Street was the Caledonia, a long concert hall with tables, a stage at one end and a flourishing bar at the other. Any customer who thought he could sing was invited to take the stage, and if he escaped being hissed off he could take his hat round the tables. It was customary for each patron to drop exactly one

penny into the hat. Harry Stodel was a star performer at the Caledonia.

Taverns and music-halls were noisy but respectable compared with the many “cafes” with lemonade bottles in their windows and brothels behind the shop. Decent citizens of Cape Town might have remained unaware of some of the wild behaviour if the madams had not flaunted the charms of their staffs in suburbs where such licence was unknown. They hired carriages on Sunday afternoons and took the girls for drives to Sea Point and Camps Bay. Combining business with pleasure, they threw out cards with their addresses to men on the pavements. Not all the men favoured

in this way regarded it as a compliment.

Women who had been turned out of Johannesburg by Lord Roberts set up in business in Cape Town streets which had previously been beyond reproach. Brothels were established not only in such obvious thoroughfares as Dock Road and Bree Street, but also in Orange Street and Queen Victoria Street.

Feeling aroused by this state of affairs culminated in a public meeting in October 1902 at the Metropolitan Hall. Mr. W. Thorne, the mayor, was in the chair. All the Christian religions were represented, and the Rev. A. P. Bender was on the platform for the Jewish community.

Dr. Ross, a clergyman, put the resolution: the meeting viewed with alarm the growth of immorality in Cape Town and called upon the government to deal with the evil, to protect wives and daughters and prevent offensive spectacles.

Four hundred houses of ill-fame had been closed during the past six months, said Dr. Ross, and fines amounting to eight thousand five hundred pounds had been inflicted. Yet in spite of the good work done by the police, Cape Town was facing a great moral crisis.

“The situation is almost incredible,” went on Dr. Ross. “I know the United States and most of the European capitals, but there is nothing like Cape Town anywhere in

those countries. Brothels here are owned by individuals and syndicates. There is open soliciting from doors and windows. In spite of the convictions, the evil has remained – perhaps it has grown. As soon as a brothel is closed, the occupants move on to another one.”

The Archbishop of Cape Town, who seconded the resolution, declared that the landlords were to blame. They charged exorbitant rents and knew why the tenants were willing to pay. Spectacles of vice which appeared every day must be put down with a strong hand.

“We must not turn all our displeasure on the women,” went on the Archbishop. “Many of them are more sinned against than

sinning; they have been driven to sin by necessity, and brought from distant places not knowing why they were coming to Cape Town. The procurers and landlords are to blame. My last word is this – the streets must be cleaner, the houses purer, and the city free from shame.”

The Hon. A. Wilmot announced that Mr. Graham, an able criminal lawyer, was drafting a Bill which would make it possible for magistrates to impose hard labour instead of fines. It was not right that debased men who enticed girls should be let off with a fine.

“I do not say that the police are being bribed,” declared Mr. Wilmot, “but strong, rich, immoral

organisations can afford to pay fines and distribute bribes. Great precautions and safeguards are necessary. We must try to inform the women and send them to Good Shepherd homes.”

The Rev. A. P. Bender pointed out that men could not be made virtuous by Act of Parliament, but there were times when it was necessary to rouse the government to a sense of duty. Not only the tenants of the brothels should be punished but the men who lived on the proceeds.

The Rev. G. Robson said that he had laboured in District Six for ten years, and had noticed the growth of the evil. “It is impossible to speak calmly, in measured terms, of

the great vice in this city," he declared. "Clergymen visiting the sick and poor are insulted by victims of sin from doorways."

Mr. J. A. S. Watson stated that the position had deteriorated, and that Cape Town was a standing disgrace to the whole world.

The resolution was carried unanimously. Soon afterwards the matter was raised in the City Council.

Councillor Thomas Harris estimated that there were seven hundred brothels in the city. It was a second Sodom and Gomorrah. Some tenants paid as much as fifteen pounds a month for most inferior premises. Pimps stood in the doorways in Waterkant and Plein Streets. The city

was infested with loose girls and the men who lived on them. "I have lived here for twenty years, and I could a tale unfold," Councillor Harris proclaimed. "Why, I have seen girls being thrashed in the street by their bullies. The trouble is that some brothels are owned by men in very high positions. Some say this is a necessary evil. If it is, then I suggest that a special district should be set apart for it."

"Rather hard on the district," commented Mr. Thorne, the mayor, amid laughter.

The City Council sent a deputation to the government. And after only a short delay the problem was debated in Parliament. Advocate T. L. Graham, Q.C., M.L.A., introduced

the Betting Houses, Gaming Houses and Brothels Suppression Bill. He quoted from a police report stating that the police knew of one hundred and fifty houses of ill-fame, thirty gaming houses and several "Chinese dens". There were six hundred prostitutes in Cape Town; four hundred "Continental", twenty-five British, seventy-five white, born in the colony, and one hundred Cape coloured.

"Continental," went on Mr. Graham, earned on an average about two pounds a day. The police were in favour of granting licences for brothels and confining them to certain parts of the city. Mr. Graham said he was totally opposed to this idea, as he was not prepared to legalise evil.

Mr. John X. Merriman, possibly the finest orator of the Old Cape House, made one of his most memorable speeches that day. "This is vice, not crime, and it is difficult to legislate for vice," Mr. Merriman began. "If you suppress vice in one direction it breaks out in another. Vice is inherent in human nature. It is impossible to suppress vice entirely, but when vice flaunts itself in the street it should be dealt with.

"Prostitution is now looked upon with horror, but it was not always so. The prostitute is the supreme type of vice, yet she is ultimately the most effective guardian of virtue. But for her, the unchallenged purity of countless happy homes would be polluted. Not a few who, in the pride of their



untempted chastity think of the prostitute with an indignant shudder, would have known the agony of despair but for her. She remains, while creeds and civilisations rise and fall, the eternal priestess of humanity, blasted for the sins of the people.”

Mr. Merriman agreed that conditions in Cape Town had become a public scandal. It was a seaport, there were many people with money to spend, and owing to the war there were many refugees. He appealed to the House not to penalise the women, but to punish the wretches who lived on this infamous trade. He was in favour of flogging.

In the Transvaal before the war, continued Mr. Merriman, syndicates had been formed to bring in prostitutes. It was a horrible purpose, and nothing more diabolical could be imagined. The Transvaal had deported the women on conviction, and conditions in Cape Town were due to that law.

Colonel David Harris complained that there should have been two Bills to deal with these different matters, one for gambling, the other for vice. He argued that if the brothels were abolished the unfortunate women would be driven on to the streets, and respectable people would have to remain at home after dark.

This view was loudly applauded. Members realised they were dealing with a difficult matter, and in the end they sent the Bill to a Select Committee. The Bill was re-cast, read a second time. When it became law early in 1903, procuring and “living on the proceeds” became subject to higher penalties and lashes; while even the most peaceful brothel became illegal.

Of course it did not abolish prostitution entirely, but it certainly transformed Cape Town. Most of the “Continental” departed. Those who remained had to carry on their trade discreetly to avoid prosecution. Some found a way out by bribing the

police, and in 1904 a sub-inspector and a constable were convicted for accepting “protection money.”

The municipal official who was my main informant on this disreputable episode declared that the change created many problems for those who administered the city. So many people cleared out that the municipality found itself short of cash. Apparently the bookmakers, gambling saloon proprietors and others had been contributing more to Cape Town’s coffers than the authorities realised. Trade slumped, and only after a decade did Cape Town recover its old prosperity.

I think it was the end of the South African War that was really responsible for the depression. But

the old men say no – it was the too sudden return to respectability.



## Chapter Twenty-Two THREE MYSTERIES SOLVED

*Not as the rest, for greed of spoil,  
He ruled by Table Bay:  
In new-built barn and seeded soil,  
His little kingdom lay.  
Cornfield and garden, oak and vine,  
He loved and tended well  
"Who plants a tree is friend of  
mine,"  
Quoth Simon van der Stel.*

LANCE FALLAW

ONCE I knew an industrious old scholar who spent about half a century uncovering the secrets and stories of the past and filing them neatly away. He used small cards, thousands upon thousands of cards, so that his life's work finally occupied a row of steel cabinets.

I have access to those secrets. Others have entered this marvellous storehouse of information, but few, if any, have found such treasure as I have dug up. This was simply because they were unable to read the old man's handwriting. I had the benefit of personal instruction many years ago. Those hieroglyphics hold no mysteries for me.

You may remember the smudged notes I found in the back of the 1904 Cape Town guide.

(1) Simon van der Stel was a coloured man. Investigate.

(2) Probable solution of George Rex mystery will be found in *George and Knysna Herald*. (Date indecipherable).

(3) Was the Treaty signed in the old cottage at Woodstock?

Those steel filing cabinets held the answers to all three questions. They gave me the clues as though by magic, and once again I saw the gleam of the long-hidden gold of history.

The suggestion that Simon van der Stel was anything but a pure Dutchman of good family came as a surprise to me. At school I had come to regard Simon van der Stel as the first full governor of the Cape and one of the greatest. Simon was the man who planted oak avenues; who gave his name to Stellenbosch; the road builder, the explorer of Namaqualand, the man who retired to Groot Constantia and devoted himself to cattle-breeding. Of course there was no reason why a coloured man should not have achieved such things, but somehow I had not imagined that a coloured man at the Cape would have been given the chance. Moreover, it did not seem likely that a coloured man would have married Jacoba

Johanna Six of Amsterdam, daughter of one of Holland's most aristocratic families.

When I followed the references which I found in the filing cabinet, the light shone on Simon van der Stel's ancestors. His father Adrian was born at Dordrecht in 1605 and sailed for the Dutch East Indies at the age of eighteen. After serving the Company for a time, Adrian became a free burgher and set up as a merchant in Batavia. He returned to the Company's service in 1635, and was appointed Governor of Mauritius. There, four years later, he married Maria Lievens, daughter of Captain Hendrik Lievens.

Some accounts state that Maria was a slave. As the daughter of an

officer in the Company's service, she cannot have been a slave. It is possible, however, that her mother had that status. Her mother was Monica da Costa, and Maria was born on the Coromandel coast of India. Dr. A. J. Boeseken, who carried out a great deal of research into the Van der Stel family, stated: "Simon's grandmother thus had Asiatic blood, unless she was a slave who had come from elsewhere."

Monica da Costa sounds to me like a Goanese, though it might be argued that she was Portuguese. However, there is other evidence. Simon's father was murdered in Ceylon, and his mother died when he was thirteen. Research workers in the archives of Batavia found an

official document which made it clear that when the orphan Simon van der Stel was sent to school in Holland, his capital remained in the custody of the Orphan Chamber at Batavia “in view of the fact that he is a person of mixed blood.”

Mixed blood was no handicap in the Dutch East India Company, and in Holland to this day the coloured person suffers no disabilities.

Sir Percival David, authority on historical portraits, once described Simon van der Stel as “that dark-complexioned, cheerful, brisk little man.” He stated that he had been unable to trace any portrait of Simon. This is remarkable, perhaps, in view of the fact that the Six

family were among Rembrandt’s patrons.

Probably the touch of colour had faded considerably in the tyrant Willem Adrian van der Stel, who succeeded his father Simon as governor of the Cape.

George Rex, that mysterious and romantic figure, is usually linked with Knysna. My old friend and newspaper colleague Miss Sanni Metelerkamp, who was a Rex descendant, called her biography *George Rex of Knysna*. Nevertheless, he was George Rex of Cape Town for some years.

I have tried to probe this deep secret on many occasions, and in recent years I have had to revise some of my former views in the

light of newly-discovered evidence. But first let me summarise the elementary facts and the Rex legend for the benefit of those who have not studied the mass of conflicting literature which has grown up round this remarkable character. Then I will present the new evidence.

Mr. George Rex arrived in Cape Town in 1797 to take up the post of Marshal of the Vice-Admiralty Court. His letters of appointment stated that he had received this post "in consideration of good and faithful service, and for certain other good and lawful causes moving us in this behalf." The salary was about one thousand pounds a year. Rex had been licensed as a notary public in

London eleven years before his arrival, and at the Cape he acted as notary public to the Governor. He was also Advocate for the Crown, and appeared at courts'-martial at the Castle.

As the Marshal of the Vice-Admiralty Court he "arrested" ships under court warrant, arranged for the ships to be sold if ordered, and took charge of seized ships and their cargoes.

Winifred Tapson, author of the most accurate story of George Rex published so far, quotes a traveller of 1830 who mentioned rumours of George Rex's royal origin. I have traced a much earlier rumour. A Mr. George Twistle complained in 1801 that Rex had been presented



with one of the best posts in the colony simply because he was a son of George III.

According to legend, firmly believed by Sanni Metelerkamp after long investigation, and by other Rex descendants, George Rex was the son of George III and Hannah Lightfoot, the Quakeress, as a result of a morganatic marriage.

It has been suggested that the Royal Marriage Act of 1772 was insisted upon by George III to secure the Royal line irrevocably after his State marriage to Queen Charlotte. George Rex, it has been argued, might have had a claim to the throne but for this legislation.

So the unfortunate George Rex was sent into exile at the Cape. He

made himself comfortable at the mansion called Schoonder Zigt, with its fine garden. He took a mistress named Johanna Rosina Ungerer, and had four children while living in Cape Town. According to legend, he had promised George III that he would never marry. He never married; but whether this was owing to a promise or a personal whim cannot be decided now.

Rex had to sell Schoonder Zigt when the first British occupation ended. He lost his post, and for a time he was interned at Stellenbosch. Then he trekked away to Knysna with his family to start a fresh saga in that wild forest region. I am not a wholehearted admirer of George Rex, for he

treated his first mistress shamefully. Nevertheless, his achievements at Knysna reveal a man of great courage and determination who also appears to have been the affectionate father of two large and well educated families.

Who was George Rex? Those who oppose the royal origin theory say that he was a member of a Rex family in Whitechapel, son of a distiller. Whitechapel, let me explain, was a more prosperous suburb of London in the eighteenth century than it is today. The Rex family of Whitechapel were well-to-do, educated people.

It is a fact that George Rex of Knysna was born at exactly the

same time as a George Rex who was born in Whitechapel and baptized on September 2, 1765. George Rex's son John was responsible for the death notice which showed that his father was seventy-three years and eight months old when he died. In other words, George Rex of Whitechapel became George Rex of Knysna. There could not possibly have been two of them.

The most patient and skilful historical investigator I know uncovered these facts and came to the conclusion that George Rex could not have had a royal ancestor. While I have the greatest respect for this view, there are still two pieces of evidence in favour of

the royal legend which cannot be lightly discarded.

First of all there are the likenesses which appear in the Rex family to this day – the heavy Hanoverian profiles that bring George III back to life in the most startling manner. Winifred Tapsan based her belief in the legend mainly on these dramatic resemblances. I share that view. My friend the historical investigator (who wishes to remain unknown) declares that similarities in the faces amount to nothing more than coincidence.

Now I come to the fresh evidence which I discovered in the newspaper files, thanks to sheer chance. “Probable solution of

George Rex mystery will be found in *George and Knysna Herald*.”

There is a complete file of this newspaper in the South African Library, Cape Town. Late in 1892 the dramatic Rex item appeared, and it was taken over by other newspapers, including the *Cape Argus*.

First there was a reference to an article which had appeared in that sedate London magazine for women, the *Queen*. Walter Besant the novelist, later Sir Walter Besant, had written to the *Queen* about a letter he had received from a lady in the United States. She claimed to be a descendant of George III and Hannah Lightfoot.

Besant added some details about Hannah Lightfoot which will be familiar to students of the Rex story. Then he added: "There was and perhaps still is existing at the Cape a family claiming the same descent. I accept the story, but I do not believe that George III ever married Hannah. There is hardly any face whose features are so distinctive as the face of the House of Brunswick. I should very much like to see photographs of the descendants."

The *George and Knysna Herald* reprinted Besant's article "to invite criticism and corrections from those who know the family history." The newspaper went on: "To preside over his household at Knysna Rex brought from the Cape

a certain Mrs. Ungerer and her daughter; but this portion of the history we shall leave untouched save with the remark that the pledge exacted from him in England that he was never to marry was never violated, although six sons and seven daughters were born who assumed the paternal name.

"One relic of considerable significance was discovered in the ruins of Melkhout Kraal after the fire soon after George Rex's death – a seal, one side bearing a crown with the letters G.R. divided. On the reverse side was an inscription: 'Though lost to sight to memory dear'."

The *George and Knysna Herald* added: "This information was

supplied to the newspaper by George Rex, youngest and only surviving son of George Rex. Mr. Besant's doubts would be set at rest, we are sure, if he could see the last male representative or the original founder of the Rexes here. If the features are not distinctive of the House of Brunswick, then George III was not the descendant of the Hanoverian King."

There we have an important statement which escaped Sanni Metelerkamp and all the other investigators of the Rex legend. Moreover, we have for the first time a clear indication that George Rex spoke to his children about his royal origin, and that they were aware of the reason why he had never married.

The *George and Knysna Herald* sent photographs of George Rex junior to Besant, but I have not been able to discover whether Besant commented on the matter again.

One deep mystery remains. If George Rex was the son of George III, why do we find him in the Rex family at Whitechapel, baptized as one of their own children? Miss Metelerkamp suggested that Hannah Lightfoot during her unhappy life, "hunted and persecuted" for years, may have left one of her children with a friendly family. Winifred Tapson thinks the Rexes of Whitechapel may have been the family.

I think so too. Those faces, which I have seen, and the royal relics, are

too significant to be ignored. However, research at the Cape has gone as far as it can go. Many secrets of George III are locked away in the strong room at Somerset House, London, where other British royal secrets are preserved.

Why was the name of George III linked so persistently with Hannah Lightfoot if there was no reason? In the British Museum Library recently I found references to the romance in the newspapers of the period; and one London paper, the *Citizen*, threatened on February 26, 1776, to publish the facts. However, it never did so.

Why did Hannah vanish? Her disappearance forms one of the most puzzling aspects of the whole affair.

I have read a copy of the documents kept by the Society of Friends, the Quakers, noting the absence of Hannah from their Westminster meetings. They appointed a committee to visit Hannah and these men interviewed her mother "who could not or would not tell where she was."

The Quakers then disowned poor Hannah. She lost her royal lover, her children and her religious organisation. George III made what amends he could, and neither Hannah nor her children had to suffer poverty.

Was the Treaty signed in the old cottage at Woodstock? Here I was on familiar ground, for I knew the note referred to the document which

ceded the Cape to Britain in 1806, and I remembered the cottage. It was demolished shortly before World War II.

Thanks to my old friend the scholar and his many cards, I can say with certainty that tradition does not lie. Treaty Cottage at Woodstock was the historic spot, and it is possible that the so-called “Treaty Tree” close by came into the picture.

Woodstock was Papendorp in those days. Pieter van Papendorp registered a house and erf between the Castle and the Salt River in 1788, and some say that he built the low white thatched cottage I have mentioned, which stood for nearly a century and a half.

After the Battle of Blaauwberg early in January 1806, the thirsty troops of General Baird followed the defeated Dutch to Salt River. Baird met Colonel von Prophalow, the commander of the Cape Town garrison there, and on the tenth of January the articles of surrender were signed. The original document makes it clear that the negotiations took place at Papendorp, but there has always been a certain amount of argument about the exact spot.

Now my first investigator enters the arena, Mr. W. E. Moore, a solicitor, and Mayor of Woodstock during the ‘eighties of last century. Mr. Moore became interested in the matter in the eighteen-sixties, when he met a Mr. Pieter William Zezars, certainly not a name to be forgotten easily.

Zevars claimed to have seen the Treaty signed.

“I was thirteen years old at the time,” Zevars recalled. “When it was suspected that a British fleet might arrive a special signal cannon was placed on Signal Hill. One day it fired, and then we saw dozens of ships off Robben Island. Everyone ran into the streets. As the British approached Papendorp I ran to meet them with seven other lads. We saw the generals enter the cottage. I looked through a window and watched them signing a paper.”

Mr. Moore said that Zevars was a truthful man. He had acted as his executor.

The Rev. H. C. V. Leibbrandt, keeper of the Cape archives early

this century, was asked by the Town Clerk of Woodstock early this century to give his opinion. “The cottage is one of the few historical landmarks preserved by the Colony,” Leibbrandt replied. “No written records exist, but the tradition has been supported by eye-witnesses.”

It seems that the cottage was the first house in Papendorp lying on the route of the British march. Thus it was natural that the military commanders should have made use of it.

The cottage was occupied about the middle of last century by a Mr. Faulkner, churchwarden of St. Mary's, Woodstock. He cross-examined a number of old residents



and was convinced that the story was true. William Brown, a fisherman, who had lived in Papendorp at the time of the battle, showed him the room where the generals met. The story was confirmed by one Piet Caesar, who had looked through the window.

Owned by the Diocese of Cape Town, the cottage was used for many years last century as a church school. Miss Burns was a famous teacher there, and pupils had to pay one penny a week.

The Rev. George Bergh went to Papendorp in 1893 and lived in the cottage forty years ago. He trained a new vine along the stoep to restore its historic appearance. He knew a number of old coloured

people who had heard the story from their parents. Shell-gatherers in the lime-burning industry and old slave families were able to give him details of the British invasion and the meeting at the cottage.

Woodstock grew up round the white cottage that once stood alone, so that in recent years it was difficult to find Treaty Road. The cottage was not far from Woodstock station, however, and until the end the rooms retained their eighteenth century atmosphere. They had raftered ceilings and stone-flagged floors; and in the evening as the light faded it was easy to imagine the ghosts of long ago...

Behind the house grew two *melkbos* trees, and one ancient specimen is still there. Some call it the “Slave Tree,” because slaves were sold there (and hanged there, according to legend) while others have named it “Treaty Tree.” Apparently the generals thought the room in Treaty Cottage was too small or too hot, so they adjourned outside and carried on their negotiations while seated at a table under the tree. A plaque was placed there a few years ago stating that it was “in this vicinity” that the treaty was signed.

I think the doubt about Treaty Cottage arose because there were three capitulations in January 1806. First of all General Ferguson went to the Castle as Baird’s emissary and signed a treaty with Colonel

von Prophalow. Then came the Papendorp capitulation, and finally, on January 18, there was the meeting between Baird and Janssens at Hottentots Holland, when a third document was signed.

Leibbrandt summed up: “There is no valid reason to doubt the Papendorp tradition. The event occurred very near our own time, and has never been questioned so far as I am aware.”

One last fragment of unwritten tradition is worth quoting. Those people who crowded round the cottage on the day that the Cape changed hands remembered one more little drama. British bandsmen struck up “God Save the King” at the end of the ceremony. General

Baird stopped them with a gesture.  
He was anxious to avoid hurting  
the feelings of a gallant enemy.  
Such was war early last century.

## **Chapter Twenty-Three**

### **THE FORGOTTEN PIONEERS**

CAPE TOWN, the traditional gateway, has been the scene of many pioneer efforts. Not many people realise, however, that a Cape Town suburb was the birthplace of one of last century's greatest inventions – photography.

Sir John Herschel the astronomer settled at Claremont in January 1834 and carried out many varied experiments there during the following four years. He had already discovered that hyposulphite of soda dissolved the otherwise insoluble salts of silver. That paved the way to photography. Herschel's inventions in this technique followed closely on his return to England from the Cape,

and there can be no doubt that he was carrying out photographic research work while he was at Claremont. Herschel introduced the terms “positive” and “negative”, and was the first to use the word “photographed.”

Cape Town's first professional photographer appears to have been a Mr. William Ring, who stepped on shore in 1847 with his daguerreotype apparatus. He produced miniatures for locketts at twenty-five shillings each, and promised his customers that “neither the action of light nor time will destroy the impression.” Mr. Ring went on to Grahamstown and Port Elizabeth, demonstrating the new magic.

Early cameramen liked to call themselves “professors,” and it was in 1851 that “Professor” John Paul set up the first portrait studio in Cape Town. He offered to take “true and correct likenesses, tastefully coloured, giving all the expression of life and beauty.” Paul’s studio was in Long Street. He operated from ten to six daily, “in any weather.” All the sitter had to do was to remain absolutely still for twenty seconds.

Outdoor photography was more difficult. I do not know whether Cape Town can claim a “first” in this branch; but someone in Durban secured a fairly good picture of the wreck of the sailing ship *Minerva* in 1850 as she lay on the rocks at the Bluff. The famous picture of a little girl at Bellwood, Sea Point,

came five years later. Then, in 1859, Mr. Yorke photographed a ceremony at the Somerset Hospital, Cape Town, in spite of the smoke from the guns that fired the salute. Mr. Yorke also took stereoscopic views of Cape Town. Prince Alfred’s visit in 1860 was recorded by more than one camera, and Saul Solomon printed a souvenir album.

Probably the most remarkable early pictures, if only they could be found, were of Table Mountain covered in snow. That was on July 19, 1862, and the *Cape Argus* reported that excellent pictures and stereoscopic views were taken. James Chapman the explorer sent a set of his photographs to the South African Museum the following

year, and these included the very first picture of the Victoria Falls.

By that time Cape Town had a couple of dozen studios, and Heynes Mathew, the chemists, were selling photographic materials. It was still a complicated process. You had to buy the glass plates and paper, and sensitise them yourself with albumen and a nitrate of silver solution. Plates had to be exposed while still wet, for the image would not appear on any part which dried out.

Among the professionals who set up in business in the eighties was a Mr. David Selkirk. He remained in his Strand Street studio for many years, and was assisted by a son, Mr. J. N. Selkirk, who

described one of their more unusual experiences to me. That was the day when a bandy-legged master mariner dragged a lion up the stairs into the studio and asked for a picture to be taken.

Owing to the growling of the lion the Selkirks found difficulty in concentrating on their work. Word of the arrival of the lion had gone round, and a crowd gathered in the street. Meanwhile the lion gave trouble, forced its way into the darkroom, and upset a large bottle of nitrate of silver. This had the effect of turning the lion black. The lion had slipped its collar by this time, and when it knocked the captain over and ran down into the street there was panic.

Horses bolted. Malay coachmen were terrified. Only those people watching safely from balconies saw the humour of the situation. Fortunately the lion found its way back to the Central Jetty, where the captain had landed, and it sprang into one of the ship's boats.

Early photography was not always so exciting, but an event which caused a stir in the seventies was the first arrest of a criminal as a result of a photograph. His portrait was circulated by the police in Cape Town, and he was recognised in Kimberley and arrested.

Newsreel cameramen were at work in the Cape much earlier than most people imagine. An expedition landed in Cape Town from the old

*Dunottar Castle* late in 1899 to film the South African War. They were led by a Mr. W. K. L. Dickson, who wrote a book about their adventures called *The Biograph in Battle*.

Their first pictures showed the boys diving for money at Madeira and General Redvers Buller walking round the decks. Boer prisoners-of-war were filmed at Simonstown. When they travelled up-country they recorded the naval guns, armoured trains, and a number of actual fighting scenes. The relief of Ladysmith made the most dramatic film of all.

Balloons and parachutes are also older than you might think. As far back as 1816 the *Cape Town*

*Gazette* announced that a balloon twenty-five feet long and seventy-five feet in circumference, accompanied by a cat would ascend from the Castle, weather permitting, at ten in the morning of December the eighteenth. Private individuals would have to pay one rix-dollar to enter the Castle, but officers of the garrison could watch free of charge.

Then the *Gazette* forgot all about this first ascent. I never found out what happened to the unfortunate cat. First human balloonist in South Africa was Major Elsdale, who took a balloon to Mafeking in 1885 and got up to six hundred feet. That started a ballooning craze, and in the eighteen-nineties a "Professor" Harry Goodall made a name for

himself at country shows by rising thousands of feet in hot-air balloons and then jumping with a parachute.

He had a narrow escape at Uitenhage once when his parachute failed to open properly and he fell much too fast into a clump of aloes in the English Church cemetery. Everyone thought he must be dead, but the aloes had broken his fall. He walked out very pale, and told the crowd that the parachute lines had become twisted. He had put it right with a jerk but by that time he was very close to the ground.

Goodall was killed at Jagersfontein in September 1892, when his balloon was dashed against the side of a hill while ascending.



Apparently he was unable to free himself from the trapeze which he used, and he was dragged over rocks and through bushes for hundreds of yards before the onlookers could reach him. That was South Africa's first air fatality. The newspapers stated that Goodall was heavily insured.<sup>7</sup>

Shortly after Goodall's death "Professor" Price, who called himself the "world's champion aeronaut", announced that he would go up to seven thousand feet from the Newlands cricket ground and jump. This was a balloon which

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<sup>7</sup> South Africa's first aeroplane fatality occurred in October 1913, when E. W. Cheeseman, a flying instructor, crashed near Kimberley.

Price had bought from Goodall's estate, and it was named the Cloud King. The ground was crowded, and one newspaper mentioned the presence of gaol-birds and card-sharpers. Mr. L. P. Smuts of the Cape Town Cricket Club asked the police to "stop the roguery". However, there was too much wind that afternoon, and the ascent had to be abandoned. Price made a number of balloon flights after that, and I believe he trained Miss K. Cameron, the first woman in South Africa to make a parachute drop. That was in 1893, outside Johannesburg. Often as a small boy living beside the reservoir in Oranjezicht I was told of the death of a daring Jewish parachute "professor" named Isidore Michaels. He should have been

warned by a narrow escape shortly before his last ascent.

It was on a calm night in May 1900 that Michaels inflated his balloon in the Good Hope Gardens at the top of Plein Street. The balloon was described as the largest ever seen in South Africa, eighty-two feet high, with a circumference of one hundred and sixty-six feet. It took an hour to fill it with hot air to its capacity of sixty-eight thousand cubic feet.

“Let go!” shouted Michaels at nine-fifteen. The balloon shot up, its passage clearly marked by burning material from the interior. (This was a dangerous characteristic of hot air balloons). Michaels jumped from about three thousand feet, falling very fast because some of his para-

chute cords had been burnt through. He alighted on the roof of a house in St. John’s Street; and when he was helped down, a doctor was called to attend to hip injuries. The balloon landed not far away.

Michaels went up again from the Good Hope Gardens one month after that episode. This time he reached five thousand feet, drifting towards Table Mountain. Fletcher, the engine-driver at the electric light works beside the Molteno reservoir, saw Michaels coming down slowly towards the water. When the parachute was about one hundred feet up he heard Michaels shouting: “Help, help I can’t swim.” The reservoir was thirty-seven feet deep. Michaels, entangled in his parachute harness, never had a chance. Fletcher

went in after him, but the water was cold, he suffered from cramp, and had to give up the attempt. Members of the fire brigade then dragged the reservoir and found the body. At the inquest the magistrate said that balloon ascents were not in the public interest and should not be permitted. Cape Town suffered from a water shortage after that tragedy, for the reservoir was drained and cleaned.

Balloons were used by the British Army during the South African War. Kitchener, advancing on Johannesburg, had an observation balloon carried along on an ox-wagon.

I also found out about the parachute incident on the Parade, recalled by

the old newspaper print in the back of my guide-book. That was in January 1906, and that parachutist had the closest shave of all.

Frank Fillis, the great circus proprietor, was the man who arranged the Parade balloon show. He was a master of the sensational display. Fillis had recently arrived in Table Bay in a steamer, the *Black Prince*, which he had chartered to bring his new show from New York.

He promised the public a pony the size of a springbok, a horse that could do the cakewalk, performing bears and wolves. And he let it be known less directly that he had brought an “airship” with him; but the details were still secret.

Fillis was not the circus pioneer in South Africa, for the first little circus had reached Cape Town several decades earlier. But everyone who remembers Fillis will grant him first place in the South African circus world. Fillis really was fantastic. A star performer himself as a horseman, he engaged some of the finest circus artists in the world. Pagel appeared as a lion tamer under Fillis. I must digress to bring Frank Fillis before you.

It was in 1879 that Fillis put on his first show in Cape Town. Fair-haired, with a healthy complexion, he wore a black ringmaster's coat decorated with medals. He was a charming personality, and everything he did was on a lavish scale.

A feat which he carried out himself in those early days was a springboard leap over the heads of twenty soldiers holding rifles and fixed bayonets. As he struck the springboard the order was given: "Fire!" Fillis had rehearsed the act with circus hands lined up with pitchforks but the feat was still one of the most daring ever seen in the ring. He landed safely on a large mattress while the whole audience rose and yelled approval.

His show became so popular in Cape Town, especially with the Malays, that he was allowed to put up a permanent circus building on the Parade, and it stood there for years. During the year 1888 the second half of the show was devoted to a circus version of Ouida's *Under Two*

*Flags*, adapted for Fillis by C. W. Drury of Kimberley. Fillis played the role of hero, while Cigarette was a marvellous rider named Vicenta Cooke, known in the circus as Lazelle. She had been a flying trapeze artist and “human cannon ball” at the age of fourteen. She was eighteen when Fillis took her on at one hundred pounds a week. Fillis married her when she was nineteen.

Frank’s uncle, James Fillis, was equerry-in-chief at the Russian Cavalry School in St. Petersburg. Frank sent his wife there for a sort of post-graduate course, and she took part in a command performance before the Czar and Czarina.

Fillis and his wife toured Australia and India with the circus. In 1900

they took the famous “Savage South Africa” show to England. Hundreds of raw natives were in the cast, in charge of a descendant of Lobengula. Five years later, in the United States, he produced various South African War battles with the aid of General S. Cronje and De Wet as technical advisers. A master of the sensational display indeed.

Frank Fillis was said to have been the first to bring to South Africa the Arab strain in horses and the Alsatian dog. But now we see him in Cape Town in 1906 with his American company. His star on this occasion was Gurney Speedy, champion high diver of the United States. This was such a breath-taking act that some people could not stand the strain. I know a Sea Point

family which left the show on the Parade just before Speedy came on because the husband feared that his wife would have a heart attack. Lulu, the little girl of the family, looked back as they entered their governess-cart outside the railway station. Gurney Speedy was way up on a tiny platform above the big-top, standing out there alone against the evening sky, preparing to dive through the gap in the canvas into a little tank one hundred and twenty feet below. The tank was square, sixteen feet by sixteen. It was four feet deep, filled with water to a depth of three feet.

As the little girl stared back wistfully, Speedy shot down out of sight like an arrow. Then came the

roar of admiration and relief from the great tent.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Mr. Cecil Fillis (son of Frank) who appeared as a clown in the circus, informed me that there was a controversy in Cape Town about the height of Speedy's dive. It was measured by Fire Brigade officials, who confirmed the 120 ft. Speedy needed this height, for it gave him time to bring his body into the correct position for the very shallow dive before striking the water. He weighed 210 lbs in his tights. Only a heavy man could control the dive, and it could not be done on a windy night. Speedy took trunks full of tights wherever he went, as he needed a new outfit almost every night; the impact ripped his tights

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off, and his wife always stood beside the bath with a dressing-gown.

Speedy received £75 a week for his act, and carried out his dive for eighteen years. He had only one eye, the result of an accident while looping the loop on a bicycle. He feared nothing. While in South Africa he announced that he would dive off the top of one of the coaches while the circus train was passing over the Orange River bridge. The police stopped him the first time, but he did it later, when the river was in flood and tree-trunks were floating down. Strange to say, he was not a good swimmer.

Mr. Fillis was not certain how Speedy ended his career, but he

That “secret airship” which Frank Fillis brought with him for the 1906 show turned out to be a showman’s exaggeration. It was just another balloon, with a parachutist named “Professor” McDermott. But the unrehearsed performance which McDermott gave on the Parade in Cape Town was unique. No parachutist on earth would have cared to repeat it.

McDermott filled his balloon with hot air in the ordinary way. A *Cape Argus* photographer took a picture of

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thought that he hit the side of the tank at the London Hippodrome, broke his hip and retired. Often and often Speedy missed the side of the tank by inches, and some have told me that he was killed. L.G.G.

the balloon well above the buildings, with McDermott hanging from a trapeze and ready to jump. No sooner had the photographer changed his plate than the balloon caught fire. The second picture shows McDermott streaking towards the earth. In spite of the short drop the parachute opened just in time and McDermott landed safely close to the railway wall.

Apparently the crowd was not satisfied with this drama, so McDermott inflated another balloon and went up again. This time the balloon capsized before McDermott had gained sufficient height to jump safely. The height was estimated at less than two hundred feet. Nevertheless, he had to jump or fall

with the ill-behaved balloon, and he chose to stick to the balloon.

It fell so fast, with the hot air escaping, that McDermott seemed to be facing certain death. There was also the risk that the balloon might drift over the railway lines and land in front of a train. The tense crowd saw the almost empty balloon fold itself over the telegraph wires on the edge of the Parade. By a miracle the fall had been broken. McDermott reached the ground with nothing more serious than a scratched face.

“McDermott often landed in funny places,” Cecil Fillis told me. “Once he came down on the slope of the ‘Big Hole’ in Kimberley.”

One more Cape Town air pioneer – Mr. William Beedle, the piano-tuner



who designed and built an airship. The inventive Mr. Beedle had his own little piano factory in Harrington Street during the last two decades of last century. "Beedle pianos" had steel frames and other original features. But while Mr. Beedle made a living in this gentle, musical way he was saving money for a far more ambitious project.

He sailed for England during the South African War with his capital and his design. It was nothing less than a dirigible airship that he intended to launch; and he first published his views on the subject in Germany in a book called *Die Luftschiffahrt*. Germany was leading the world in airship construction, and no doubt Beedle

expected to gain more attention there than elsewhere.

During 1901 a large reward known as the "Deutsch prize" was offered for practical airships. One of the London newspapers reported that a rival to the famous Santos Dumont had appeared, a Cape Town piano-tuner named Beedle. The newspaper said that Beedle's torpedo-shaped airship could be steered and handled as easily as a cycle on the road. It was one hundred feet long, sixteen feet in diameter, with a gas capacity of eighteen thousand cubic feet. The airship would be driven by a fifteen horse-power petrol engine. It would carry two men.

Moreover, this was no mere dream on a drawing-board. Beedle's airship was actually under construction. It would be covered with untearable fabric, and there would be five separate gas compartments.

Beedle explained that the gas alone would be just sufficient to keep the airship off the ground. Then a "lifting fan" would come into operation and raise the nose for flight. When reversed, the fan would bring the airship back to earth without loss of gas. Beedle declared boldly that he hoped to make a trial trip across the English Channel.

His airship was ready for testing in 1902, and he made several

"experimental hops" near London. These tests revealed that the framework was too heavy. He replaced it with a lighter steel frame and an engine made almost entirely of aluminium.

Beedle stated that four and a half gallons of petrol would last him for twenty-four hours. I think he must have intended to drift about the countryside like the "balloonatics" of the period, without using his motor. The petrol consumption he mentioned would be envied by all modern airmen.

In one respect the ingenious Beedle was far ahead of his time. He had a propeller with two steel tubal blades covered with canvas, and he could alter the angle of the blades:

In other words, a variable pitch propeller! The engine ran at three hundred revolutions a minute.

Beedle designed a “two-bladed fan” in place of the conventional rudder, and said that this could also be used as elevator to supplement the lifting power. He claimed that his airship could turn in its own length. The propeller was at the rear, while the steering device was in front.

Reporters described the Beedle craft as a “cigar-shaped balloon with mackerel head and tail.” One newspaper added: “The inventor, Mr. William Beedle, late of Cape Town, has engaged the interest of the War Office authorities.”

Beedle’s new airship took the air for the first time in November 1903. A newspaper declared: “South African inventor Beedle is likely to make a really successful airship voyage. His craft has numerous advantages. The first ascent, made at Alexandra Palace, was successful.”

Two days were spent filling the gas containers, and then the beautiful vessel swung out of the shed. Guide ropes were attached. Ballast was adjusted. The ship rose to fifty feet. Beedle, who acted as captain, started the motor.

“The airship was carried away by the force of the breeze, and described a graceful semi-circle,” said one report. “The ship went

away so rapidly that the men holding the guide-ropes were pulled all over the ground. However, the weight of the ropes had the effort of bringing the ship to the ground. A large crowd followed it and some narrowly escaped the fans.”

An observer remarked: “It will be something for South Africans to feel proud of if it should eventually be found that it has been reserved for one of them to solve the problem of aerial navigation.”

Beedle demonstrated his airship in many parts of England and Scotland. Apparently he did not fly from place to place, but made ascents at Birmingham,

Manchester, Glasgow and other cities.

The Cape Argus published a picture of the Beedle airship in November 1905. The report stated that Beedle was bringing his airship to Cape Town, and was expected in December that year.

I searched all the newspaper files in vain for further news of Beedle and his airship. Did he crash, or did his extraordinary enterprise merely fold up like a pricked balloon? I wish that someone could tell me.

Beedle pianos are still to be seen in Cape Town. They have lasted much longer than the Beedle airship.



#### **Chapter Twenty-Four**

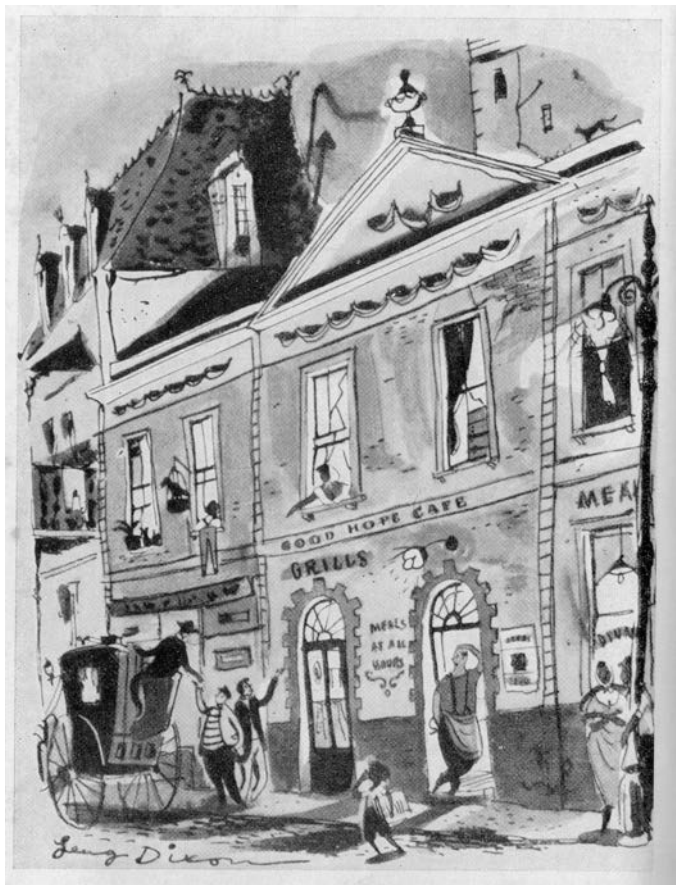
### **PIONEERS ON WHEELS**

THOSE who remember the turn of the century and the years before World War I saw the long supremacy of the horse and the ox coming slowly to an end. They also saw the first motor-cars and steam-cars.

Cape Town had two hundred licensed hansom-cabs in 1891, and you could hire one for half-a-crown for the first hour, a florin after that. Richard Cox, a cabby of those days, told me that he flourished in the

'nineties but fell on evil days after the South African War, when the trams stole his passengers. Many hansoms were shipped to Cape Town as the result of a cab slump in London; and English people liked them because they were familiar.

Cox said his best fares were men who had lost the last train to the suburbs. Late sittings of the old Cape Parliament also brought good business. One night Sir Thomas Upington went to sleep in a cab, and he had reached Kalk Bay when he woke up. Traction engines, said Cox, frightened the horses more than the motor-cars. Cox claimed that he had the best horse on the rank. It cost him fifty pounds.



Many Hansoms were shipped to Cape Town as the result of a cab slump in London.

Among those who prospered in the glorious days of the horse was a Mr. Kannemeyer. He owned the livery stables which provided carriages for the Duke of Edinburgh's visit. Later he secured premises opposite his stables in Longmarket Street and opened Kannemeyer's London Carriage Bazaar. Here a grand array of imported doctors' broughams, landaus, victorias, phaetons and dogcarts was to be seen.

Talking of landaus, this type of four-wheeled carriage has not yet vanished. They are to be seen on fine nights in Adderley Street, on the rank that was once occupied by a hundred hansoms. Drawn by white horses (no longer youthful) they carry nurses to Groote Schuur

hospital and sightseers who prefer slow movement. These are also the traditional carriages of Malay brides. One driver named Abdullah Salie was recently in charge of the very same landau that his grandfather was driving at the opening of the century.

When my 1904 guide was published, the first motor-car had yet to reach Cape Point. You left the train at Simonstown station at half past seven in the evening and put your pillow, rug and provisions on to an ox-wagon. Whips cracked, oxen strained and the Hottentot leader took the team up Red Hill. Passengers walked up the hill and climbed on to the wagon when level ground was reached. The

wagon jolted on over boulders and tree-stumps.

By eleven, the wagon had covered eight miles. At the first outspan, supper was served, the moon rose, someone told ghost stories, and another traveller played the banjo. One hour's rest followed, the women sleeping on the wagon, men beneath.

Cape Point was reached soon after daybreak. Breakfast, and then the steep climb to the lighthouse. After lunch the wagon started back to Simonstown. An hour would be spent at Smitswinkel Bay for tea. You caught the nine twenty back to Cape Town that night. The run is easier today, but I doubt whether it provides such lasting memories.

Those were also the great days of the bicycle. I believe the tandem pioneer was a cycle shop owner named Thornton of Bree Street. That was in 1898, and the spectacle of Thornton and lady on the first tandem aroused tremendous interest. Thornton was also a champion racing cyclist. Tandems soon appeared at the Green Point Track. A double tandem with four riders followed, but this never became popular.

Mr. Tracy of Dorp Street hired out bicycles at sixpence an hour. He used a tricycle himself, and became a well-known figure about the town. Some tough cyclists had a basket type of side-car for their girlfriends; but only a strong man





Now that really old motor-cars are treated with the respect they deserve I feel emboldened to recall that incredible era of motoring.

could hope to manage this combination.

My 1904 guide supplies a cyclists' road-map from the city to Wynberg and Hout Bay in one direction, to Sea Point and Camps Bay in the other. All the mountain streams are clearly marked. The cyclist of those days had to take off his shoes and carry his bike now and again.

At a Rosebank Show more than sixty years ago a "sociable bicycle" was displayed. Two riders sat side by side with one handlebar between them. Frances, who wrote a "Ladies' Letter" for a Cape Town newspaper, commented: "It did not look comfortable, I thought, and one would have to be on good terms with the other man as the

most comfortable position seemed to be when each rider put the arm not occupied by the handles round the other's waist."

One cycling pioneer I shall never forget was Mr. A. A. (Tony) Officer. He was an American who arrived last century, bringing with him a bicycle which he steered with a tiller. As far back as 1885 he rode from Cape Town to Johannesburg on that bicycle.

Tony Officer was responsible for persuading Mark Twain to intercede with Paul Kruger after the Jameson Raid for the lives of the reformers. He always claimed that this influence played a large part in the remission of the death sentences.

This vigorous old man worked as a health consultant in Cape Town for many years. On Boxing Day every year for twenty years he carried out a cycle ride of one hundred miles through Paarl and Stellenbosch. He was a conspicuous figure in his white suit.

Officer tried to repeat his Rand-Cape ride in 1933, but had to take the train over part of the route because the roads were impassable. In 1938 the *Cape Argus* started a flying scholarship contest. Officer gave his age as fifty-five and beat all the younger pilots. He was then seventy-one. I am glad to say that Tony Officer lived for twenty-two more years after winning that flying scholarship.

Cape Town's first motor-car arrived about two years after South Africa's pioneer car, a Benz, had been unpacked in Johannesburg. A picture in the *Cape Argus* in March 1899 showed the car, an air-cooled Royal Enfield Quad owned by Mr. (later Sir Alfred) Hennessy.

The Benz firm supplied several of the earliest cars, and one 1898 model was sold on the Parade during World War I for a few pounds. It was really scrap iron, but two young friends of mine worked on it until the single-cylinder fired. Showing real mechanical genius, they got that car back on the road.

Now that really old motor-cars are treated with the respect they deserve I feel emboldened to recall

that incredible era of motoring. I was not among the pioneers, though I owned a Ford Model T (and a yacht) long before I could afford such pleasures. But I drove that 1898 Benz when the model was only seventeen years old.

I drove the Benz in Oranjezicht, both car and driver being unlicensed. Since then I have sat at the wheels of fine, shining monsters; but never have I recaptured the sensation I knew as a schoolboy with the steering-lever of that Benz in my band. It was chain-driven. The back-wheels were larger than the front. Behind me was the panting engine, before me the road. I was fifteen, and that day I knew the meaning of adventure. My friends, Alfred Moir

and Leonard Crowder, should have kept that Benz. It must have been one of the first to reach South Africa, and its value today as a museum-piece would be considerable.

Some years later I was good enough to submit myself to a driving test. I was passed out by the pioneer I have mentioned, the owner of CA 1, Sir Alfred Hennessy.<sup>9</sup> He saw South Africa's

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<sup>9</sup> When Hennessy reached the Cape in 1896 he was so ill that his doctors gave him only six months to live. He recovered, took out the first driving licence, founded the Royal Automobile Club, and drove his CA 1 car until a few days before his death, in November 1963, at the age

cars grow from one to over one million.

In the days when Sir Alfred Hennessy owned the only car in Cape Town, crowds would gather whenever he stopped. He dared not park in a narrow street, for it would become blocked with people

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of eighty-eight. The CA 1 number-plate was then handed over by the family for the use of the Mayors of Cape Town. Colonel J. G. Rose, another motor pioneer who attended the ceremony, recalled that he had been offered CA 2 but had refused because it was too conspicuous. With an official speed limit of eight miles an hour he wanted something that would be more difficult to remember.

immediately and the police would order him to move on.

One evening Sir Alfred was held up by a policeman on the way to Green Point and informed that he would be charged with driving above twenty miles an hour.

“You’ve just come from England, I suppose?” remarked Sir Alfred pleasantly. “I thought so. There’s no speed limit here yet.” He was right. The police could not lay a charge.

It was in 1902 that the speed limit problem was first debated by the Divisional Council, and eight miles an hour was proposed. The Cape Argus protested. Nevertheless, the limit was later fixed at eight.

First victim of the new speed law was Mr. Charlie Rorich, a taxi-driver. He was teetering down Buitengracht Street in February 1905 at twelve miles an hour when the police timed him and got their man. Mr. Jimmy Logan, the redoubtable “Laird of Matjesfontein” was the passenger, and he was in a hurry.

Mr. Percy de Villiers (who became the second Lord de Villiers) was the magistrate who tried Rorich in the old Wale Street police court. The case aroused great interest, for people seemed to realise that history was being made. The policeman declared that Rorich was a danger to the public. Rorich was fined two pounds. When he paid, the magistrate handed him back the

money and told him to keep it as a souvenir of the occasion.

Mr. de Villiers hired Rorich’s car two months later for a run to Simondium and back. “Charlie, can’t this car go any faster?” asked Mr. de Villiers when they were well out of town.

“What about the speed limit?” asked Rorich with a meaning glance.

“Let her go,” ordered the magistrate. They touched twenty on that run, and felt the thrill more keenly than modern passengers in a jet aircraft.

Motorists regarded it as something of a feat when Colonel Jack Rose, in 1904, reached Paarl in his single cylinder car between lunch and

dinner. He telegraphed the news, and the Cape Argus had a headline next day: "Paarl Road Conquered by Motor-car". The road was described as "a necklace of death-traps".

De Dion and Gladiator cars were on sale in Cape Town early this century at about three hundred pounds apiece, while the Albion cost four hundred and fifty. Most luxurious of all was the Panhard, at twelve hundred.

Rorich had a Gladiator for some time, and when he drove it up Sir Lowry's Pass on a reliability trial, the spectators were able to keep up with the car on foot. Trained in a cycle shop, Rorich became Cape Town's first motor-mechanic. He

was also granted taxi-driver's certificate No. 1, in January 1909, issued by the Automobile Club. He did not have to undergo any test as he had taught most of the examiners and club officials to drive.

Those were marvellous times for a taxi-driver, as many people had never travelled by car and they wanted the experience. Rorich took one passenger as far as Calvinia at a shilling a mile. Roads were wagon-tracks. There were no garages. The driver pumped up his own hard tyres, and lit his oil or acetylene lamps with matches. "But I seldom had to do a repair on the road," declared Charlie Rorich.

Rorich did not own his taxi-cab. He was paid twenty-five shillings a week and five per cent of his fares. A run round the mountain cost thirty-two and sixpence, and some passengers were so delighted that they gave him a golden sovereign as a tip. In one year, when motor-cars were still a novelty, Charlie Rorich made fourteen hundred pounds for himself. Many a successful professional man would have envied him at that time.

Rorich drove Sir David Smartt, Sir Starr Jameson and Sir Thomas Smart (as prime minister) through Namaqualand and Bushmanland on political missions. In many lonely places there were people who had never seen a motor-car. A visitor from space could hardly have

attracted greater interest. In 1963 Rorich was presented with a gold plaque in recognition of sixty-four years of safe driving.

By the year 1911, however, taxis were becoming plentiful and a South African almanac stated: "The visitor will have no difficulty in hiring taxi-cabs or carriages for the drive over Constantia Nek to Hout Bay". South Africa had two thousand cars, with one quarter of them in Cape Town. The speed limit had been raised to ten miles an hour. A white chauffeur was earning three pounds a week.

Another taxi veteran I knew was James Terry, a Cockney who had driven London 'buses before he came to Cape Town early this



century. Terry drove Sir Jacobus Graaff to Malmesbury at a time when the passenger's blankets had often to be used to prevent the wheels sticking in sand.

One of Terry's first cars had a device called a "sprag", an iron spike which could be lowered to prevent the car from running away down a hill. Some makes had cogwheels on the chain-drives which had to be adjusted to allow the car to climb a hill.

Terry once picked up a strange character who sat back and said: "Muizenberg". It was a long run in those days. No sooner had they arrived than the fare ordered: "Back to Cape Town". Terry stopped in Adderley Street and

said: "That will be two pounds, please sir".

"God will reward you," announced the passenger. Terry drove at once to the Wale Street police station, took the man in with him and told his story. The district surgeon happened to be there. "You can forget about your two pounds," said the doctor gravely "Your passenger is a homicidal maniac, escaped from Valkenburg."

Pioneer of the steam-car in Cape Town was Mr. John H. Gibbs, an engineer who often visited me to relate episodes from his unusual life. Mr. Gibbs arrived in Cape Town in 1890. He supervised the first steel building here; installed machinery in the first crawfish can-

ning factory; got the first steam laundry working; made the machinery for the first flashing lighthouse; and in 1904 he imported a ten-horse-power White "steamer".

It was in pieces, but Mr. Gibbs had no difficulty in assembling it, and he ran that car for eight years. "I drove various cars in Cape Town for over half a century without even grazing a mudguard," declared Mr. Gibbs with pride. "I never took out a car insurance policy, for I was much too careful to need one. When compulsory third party insurance came in, I was so disgusted that I gave up motoring."

Long distance motoring in South Africa was started by the late Mr.

Frank Connock, a former champion cyclist. He drove from Durban to Cape Town in 1907 with Mr. R. L. Jefferson as his passenger. They travelled via Johannesburg in an eight-horse single-cylinder car taking five and a half days to Johannesburg and ten and a half days from the Rand to Cape Town. Members of the Automobile Club met them between Paarl and Cape Town and provided an escort for the triumphant finish. Mr. Connock died in 1962 at the age of eighty-eight – the last of the old car pioneers.

Some works of reference give the credit for the first Johannesburg-Cape journey to a Count de Rivetera, who attempted the run in 1905 in a frail motor runabout. But the Count admitted defeat when he found that

his car was unable to cross the sandy Karoo riverbeds. He put his car on the train.

Visiting motorists were complaining about bad driving in Cape Town as far back as 1912. Charles Jarrott and S. F. Edge, famous motorists of the period, had this to say when they returned to London: "One of the things that first strikes the motoring visitor to the Cape is the total absence of any attempt to regulate road traffic, due to the ignorance of the rules of the road displayed by the majority of drivers.

"So much had I heard of South African roads, or the lack of them – beaten paths across the open veld, stony tracks along the shallow riverbed, crooked byways possessing

neither breadth nor straightness – and to me it seemed that I was landing in the Hades of the real road lover; and lo! when I stepped ashore at Cape Town I found a road (the Natives call it the Mountain Road) and in company with my friend, Mr. S. F. Edge, I went in search of the unknown.

"We started off to explore ... and we found a Riviera, a winding, twisting, Cornish road, with a perfect surface, beautifully graded slopes and rounded curves, and scenery finer than Beaulieu, Eze and Monte Carlo, a blue sea and turquoise sky and a glorious sun that shone all day with a radiance and warmth which made driving too delightful to express."

Dr. Ben Vercuil was an early record-breaker on the Cape Town-Johannesburg route. Punctures were dreaded by motorists at that period, and when he tore out of Cape Town in November 1921 his car was festooned with spare tyres.

He lost his way eleven times and took three and a half days. Yet when he stopped outside the Johannesburg City Hall he told the reporters: "This record may not be beaten in our time. I have not slept since Cape Town. I keep on seeing impossible things – never dead ahead of me but in the corner of my eye. At one time I thought a horse was galloping past my car."

Dr. Vercuil's record was beaten four months later. Early this

century sixty miles an hour was regarded as the limit of human endurance. This century has shown that speed is unpredictable.\*-285

## **Chapter Twenty-five**

### **I HEARD THE OLD MEN SAY**

SATURDAY morning again, and I have parked my car between the City Hall and the flower-sellers. Again the old Grand Parade is as pungent as a Malay curry. Everything is alive and pulsating under the sun. This ground which has now been declared an “historical monument” proves that history does come to life.

It occurs to me, however, that the beauty is all on my side of the street, among the ericas and proteas; that the City Hall is no masterpiece of architecture. The only painting I know in which that classical façade looks handsome is one by Gwelo Goodman, done nearly half a century ago. He softened the blow by a

clever use of foreground. And that picture had to be repainted before the artist was satisfied with it.

Yet how proud Cape Town citizens were of their City Hall on that July evening in 1905 when it was opened. City councillors had talked about building it for twenty years before the contract was placed. Even then it took more than five years to complete the building.

There was a war on. When they dug the foundations, the soil was found to be treacherous, and it released poisonous gases. A ship with a cargo of stone for the building was lost in a Table Bay gale. So by the time it was finished, Cape Town ratepayers had a bill of £170,000 on their hands. Big money in those days.

At the opening banquet the mayor, Mr. Hyman Liberman, replied to criticism of delays. He pointed out that ground for Cape Town's first municipal building, the Old Town House, was set aside early in the eighteenth century, and the Dutch East India Company hesitated for forty years before they laid the foundation stone.

There was the new City Hall at last with its granite base, and campanile above the centre two hundred feet high. It had the only marble staircase in South Africa. Some people who should have known better described it as "the most beautiful modern building in the world". Professor Rowarth, on the other hand, was not at all impressed. He said the design included as many

bits of the better-known styles of architecture as the size of the place would allow.

The organ was specially planned for the grand hall by Sir George Martin of St. Paul's Cathedral, London. Lord Grimthorpe had drawn up the specifications for the clock, so that it struck the hours and chimed the Westminster quarters.

Some people still cherish invitations to that inaugural banquet, "in the two hundred and forty-eighth year since the appointment of burgher senators or councillors." That was the wording of the official programme.

Yes, the officials were proud of the brand-new building. Members of

the South African Society of Artists hired the minor hall of the City Hall for one of their early exhibitions. They were asked to be careful of the floor of light highly-polished timber. Now in those happy days the president of the Society always received a bottle of whisky on the day the pictures were hung. The secretary got a bottle of gin. Others who assisted enjoyed long beers at the expense of the Society. Whisky was three and six a bottle, gin two and nine, beer four pence.

It may have been this generous reward, or perhaps it was the sheer beauty of the pictures on the walls. In an ill-fated moment the secretary overturned his table and decorated

the new floor with a pool of blue-black ink.

Soon after World War II there were still a few old municipal officials (like Mr. E. M. "Monty" Knight) who had moved to the City Hall from the Old Town House. They have all gone now. Mr. Knight recalled that the treasury department, where he worked, was cramped. It was reached by a flight of rickety stairs, and voices were smothered by the hammering from a blacksmith's shop next door. Those men welcomed the change.

Officials were all men until 1913, when the first women joined the City Hall staff. Officials wore formal clothes, and the Town Clerk

always came to work in a frock coat.

How did the huge City Hall organisation come into being? I have mentioned the old Burgher Senate as the origin; but the Municipality of Cape Town really arose in 1839, twelve years after the Burgher Senate had been dissolved.

There had been a public outcry about the state of the Heerengracht, the filthy canal that carried the rubbish all too slowly into the sea. The whole town was dirty. Refuse was dumped anywhere and everywhere, so that Dr. Bickersteth of the Somerset Hospital complained to the police that his patients were suffering from the smells. The

police declared that they had enough to do protecting citizens from robbers. Every summer there were epidemics. Something had to be done.

So in 1839 a board of commissioners was appointed by the government and Cape Town's boundaries were defined. The commissioners had to keep accounts and call meetings of householders to fix the rates. Police work included the organisation of "sergeants of the night". They had to provide fire engines, put up lamps, manage the waterworks, repair the streets, run the markets, see that wholesome bread and meat were sold, and remove all public nuisances. Wicked people who drew or wrote things on walls or



lived by begging, were dealt with under amended regulations one year later.

The Hon. Michael van Breda was chairman of the board, and good old Cape Town names such as Hofmeyr and Wicht, Cloete and Ross, appear among the commissioners.

Thus it came about that an archway was built over the picturesque but stinking Heerengracht. Mr. van Breda had only sixteen thousand pounds a year to play with, however, and so the improvements came slowly. After all, the solitary official acting as overseer of canals, streets, bridges and fire-engines drew only ten pounds a month, with free quarters.

So great was the strain that Green Point was soon established as a separate municipality, with its own ward masters. Other suburbs followed this example; for decades Rondebosch, Mowbray, Claremont, Muizenberg and Wynberg ran their own affairs. Woodstock and Salt River formed another little municipality later in the century, with an impressive coat-of-arms which displayed a couple of lions, a shipwreck; Woltemade, and a crown and anchor.

Old Cape Town, as they called the original municipal area, received a new form of local government in 1867, when the first mayor and councillors were elected. Mr. G. J. de Korte, the mayor, was an attorney, and he retained his office

as mayor for six years. (Now you know how De Korte Street gained its name). Among the councillors were Mr. E. K. Green the wine merchant, Mr. Ball the sail maker, and Messrs. L. P. and I. J. Cauvin, who were auctioneers.

Revenue had swelled to eighteen thousand pounds a year at that time, but that amount did not allow a large Town House staff. Nineteen was the total, headed by Mr. J. A. Roos the town clerk and Mr. J. P. de Villiers, treasurer. One engineer was enough. There was one storekeeper, one chief artificer, one plumber. At the Early Morning Market you would have found a market master, one assistant, three auctioneers, a gatekeeper and Japie the messenger.

Scores of mayors have sat in Van Riebeeck's chair (if indeed Van Riebeeck ever used it, which is doubtful) since Mr. de Korte's record period of office. Years ago the City Hall authorities carried out the difficult task of securing portraits of every Mayor of Cape Town. Descendants were asked to search the attics of ancestral homes, and now a complete set adorns the walls of the Mayor's Parlour and Council Chamber. Many are specially commissioned oil paintings of the mayors in their red robes.

Ever since 1892 the Mayor of Cape Town has worn a gold mayoral chain. The mayor's mace came

later, and this is indeed an ornament with a story.

Sir John Woodhead and other influential people felt that Cape Town should possess a symbol of civic office such as the old corporations in England used. Someone suggested that the staff of the mace should be carved from the timber of a famous old man-o'-war, to endow it with historic interest. So in 1895 Sir John Woodhead sailed for England with letters of introduction from Cecil Rhodes to put the whole idea into shape.

It proved to be a long and painstaking quest, for Woodhead had not only to secure the timber but also a suitable heraldic design for the whole mace. Only with the

aid of the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) was the resourceful Woodhead able to select the wood he had set his heart upon – a fragment of H.M.S. Victory. When he had it, the timber proved to have decayed, and he went to the Prince of Wales a second time to secure a sound piece.

Woodhead then inspected about two hundred municipal maces, some of silver, others of brass, copper and iron. Finally he decided that the mace presented by King Charles II to the ancient city of Northampton was the most beautiful of all, a worthy model for the Cape Town mace.

One of Birmingham's old silversmiths then set to work to execute the complicated design. Based on the Northampton mace, the Cape Town version was modified to embody various Cape features. It was surmounted by the Imperial Crown with orb and cross. Mermaids, symbolical of Cape Town's position as a "Tavern of the Seas", divided the head into four panels. Arms of the Cape Colony and the city, and the rose, thistle and shamrock designs, were all included.

Four brackets depicted the winged heads of Mercury, to remind citizens of Cape Town's flourishing trade. (Mercury was the Roman god of commerce, you will remember). The staff was entwined with a wreath of silver laurel leaves. Disas

and vine leaves were incorporated, and a Queen Victoria medallion appeared in the bottom moulding. Nearly five feet in length and weighing more than twelve pounds, the mace was presented to the Mayor of Cape Town at a ceremony in the Old Town House three years after Woodhead's voyage to England.

You will find a bust of Lord Nelson on a plinth of H.M.S. Victory oak in Cape Town's little-known municipal museum. There is a white copper ship's bell, made in Holland in 1766, used at the Cape as a slave bell, and finally (until 1907) at the Council's stables. A Portuguese saluting cannon, dated 1643 and bearing the royal arms, is a rather mysterious exhibit. Another hand-

some object of unknown origin is a silver candelabra.

Standard weights, with the crest of the Dutch East India Company are to be seen. They were built into the walls of the Old Town House, and removed when the City Hall was built. Here, too, is the inscribed silver trowel with which the foundation stone of the Old Town House was laid more than two centuries ago.

From a showcase containing the Hyman Liberman collection of glass comes a strange, ghostly tinkle of long-forgotten enterprise. Modern glass manufacturers in South Africa are probably unaware that this complex, highly specialised industry was started at Obser-

vatory as far back as the 'eighties of last century. Some of you may remember the rows of "glass-blowers' cottages" at Observatory. A company was formed with Saul Solomon as chairman, all the shares were taken up, and a team of glass-blowers was recruited in England.

If you have been to Venice and watched the Italian master craftsmen at work you will understand what a spectacular affair glass-blowing can be. One day in 1882 the Cape Argus announced that the Observatory factory was receiving too many visitors. In future they would be limited to one day a week, and they would have to pay a shilling a head.

Observatory glass experts had found the right kind of sand at Glencairn, while flint reached Cape Town as ballast in the holds of sailing ships. It seemed that this pioneer company would succeed, for even in those days there was a great demand for bottles and other glass containers. However, something went wrong and after five years the glassblowers departed.

Early this century a new factory was built in the Glencairn valley, for one of the breweries was determined to make its own bottles. Again the venture failed, and the windswept factory building was overwhelmed by the dune sand used for the glassblowing. There were fine craftsmen among the glassblowers, however, and the

Lieberman collection reminds us of the workmanship of long ago. They made almost everything in glass.

In the Mayor's Parlour there is an ornate gilt Louis clock which was used by the Burgher Senate before the eighteenth century ended. Teak pipes, made in Java, carried the Platteklip water down to Old Cape Town, and specimens of these six-foot pipes are to be found in the City Hall.

Those who are enthralled with the pomp of yesterday could spend hours in the passages, studying the illuminated addresses; the photographs of bygone (and possibly useless) deputations; the arrivals of famous men; the hot, overdressed reception committees; the guards-

of-honour, the top-hat ceremonies; all the historic occasions which I am careful to avoid now that I am no longer a reporter. Most interesting of these relics are the sumptuous menus of feasts that would otherwise have been forgotten. I must say that the mayors and councillors of long ago had no reason to complain about their banquets.

So, I am back where I started, dreaming on the Grand Parade, thinking of the centuries which this sprawling, puzzling town has known. It is in many ways so different from the rest of South Africa, and so much more romantic. The habits of the people change but the sea and the mountain never change.

Mr. de Korte, the first mayor, may have been present at the magic-lantern lecture given by Thomas Baines, artist and explorer, when he returned from the interior. I have no doubt that Mr. de Korte was there when the Malays who manned the fire-brigade with hand-pumps gave their displays. They were paid five shillings a fire. One day they left their apparatus in disgust during a Somerset Road fire and walked off. The council sacked the lot, imported a new steam fire engine from England in 1883, and took on a volunteer crew. Some of those councillors of 1867 lived to see Cape Town's first motor fire-engine, tested in 1903 and found satisfactory.

Bars opened after church on Sundays in the 'sixties. Races at Green Point offered the greatest excitement, but auction sales were popular, and sandwiches and beer were provided when any decent house was put up for sale. Queen Victoria's birthday, on May 24, saw the most brilliant parades of the year.

It was a small town, though. Twenty men staffed the post office, including the seven "letter carriers". Germany had not come into being; consular agents in Cape Town represented the Hanseatic republics, Hanover, Mecklenburg, Strelitz and Oldenburg. Mr. W. C. Knight was vice-consul for Russia, Spain and Italy. Such a joint

responsibility would be rather embarrassing today.

The local directory gave you the salaries of every official, right down to Mr. E. Bottomore, inflictor of corporal punishment, forty-two pounds a year. (Look it up yourself if you do not believe me). I like those old directories. Sir Philip Wodehouse was governor at six thousand five hundred. But the poor fellow who handled the Robben Island surfboat got only ten pounds a year. Fortunately his quarters and rations were free.

In the year when Mr. de Korte became mayor, two "mixed commissions" were still at work, with headquarters in Adderley Street, for the suppression of the African



slave trade. My directory describes the Somerset Hospital as “a magnificent building situated at Green Point”; while the Sailors Home “preserved mariners from falling into the numerous snares to which they are exposed on reaching this port.”

I know of a picnic party of the ‘seventies that went by train to the Wynberg terminus, and then drove on to Kommetjie by wagonette. First stop was Farmer Peck’s at Muizenberg for drinks and dinner. It took eight hours from Wynberg to Kommetjie, but it was worth it. They had taken their rods and they caught more than one hundred galjoen between them. When they sauntered out on the long beach towards Chapman’s Peak someone sighted an

object that looked like an ostrich egg. It was a skull, bleached white as the sand. Then they excavated the complete skeleton. That old *strand-loper*, five feet tall, went back to Cape Town with them, and found his way into a museum.

Some people find an air of mystery in Cape Town. It is not one of those new and repulsive cities that can be penetrated at a glance; but it can be made to divulge most of its secrets if you show the affection and the interest it deserves. I know more now than I did on that memorable day when I bought the old guide book and began to read between the lines. I heard the old men say ...

THE END

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